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D. J. Cook



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SIMPLE SOULS

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BY

JOHN HASTINGS TURNER

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CHAPTER I

A DUKE

"PLEASE, sir, is this your hat?"

"My hat," said the man, instinctively raising his hand, "is on my head. No, it isn't," he added, withdrawing his hand. "Now, isn't that queer?"

He took the hat from the girl's hand, and, holding it rather vaguely at his side, regarded her steadily. With an equally steady gaze she inspected him.

What he saw was a girl in the early twenties, dark and tall, and wearing too few clothes. This was not due to fashion, but to poverty. Incidentally, she was beautiful, but he was the sort of man who would not realize that until it was pointed out to him. She would have been more beautiful still after a good dinner.

What she saw was a man between thirty and forty, who was not in the least handsome. On the other hand, his eyes atoned for everything. They were gray and a little vague, but kindness and honesty looked out of them boldly and unashamed. And this was odd, because he had had an expensive education, and might have been expected to have the usual finesse of the Society man.

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"It's very curious," he said, brushing slowly at the nap of his hat; "but this is continually happening." He stopped. "Now, women have hatpins—that must make it much less difficult."

She said nothing. They were in the Snake House at the Zoo, and they were its only occupants. Suddenly he waved his arm toward the cages.

"That," he said, "is the common python; its habits are curious but very interesting. If you observe, you will see it is now asleep. Yet the least alien sound, the smallest enemy scent——" He broke off. "Do you like snakes?" he asked.

"I hate 'em," answered the girl.

"Why?"

"I don't know. They're slimy," she said, and made a gesture of repulsion.

"That is true," he said gravely. "Let us go and sit in the garden."

She followed him without a word. He was obviously extraordinary, obviously safe, and obviously a dear. That is how she reasoned, and to talk to anyone was better than to sit on a seat and rebel in silence against a world which took no notice of her whatever.

"Aren't you going to put on your hat?" she said, as they sat down.

He was still carrying it in his hand.

"Yes, of course," he said, and put it on.

"Look here," she said suddenly, "I suppose you write or something?"

He looked up.

"Why do you think I write?" he asked.

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"Well, there's something wrong about you, isn't there?"

"All my relations say so, but I don't write."

"What do you do?"

"I am a reptilian biologist. And you?"

"I am in a boot store. I'm not now, because I've chucked it. What's your name?"

"Wynninghame."

"That's a nice name. Do you live in London?"

"Sometimes; sometimes in the country."

"Have you got two houses? Don't answer if I'm impertinent."

He smiled.

"Oh, I have lots. My servant has a list of them somewhere; or else it's my solicitor. I forget."

She looked at him for a moment; then she kicked a stone on the path.

"Isn't it awful jolly to have lots of homes?"

"I suppose it is; but I hardly ever go out of town."

"And where is your house?"

"In Piccadilly—Wynninghame House."

She stared at him.

"That big place with the lions outside?" she said. "But that belongs to a Duke. A bobby told me so."

"I am the Duke!" he said.

She gazed at him for quite a long time before she spoke again.

"Well, I never!" she said at last. "Who'd have thought it?"

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"Nobody does," he said; "it's so convenient. Now tell me about yourself."

"There isn't anything to tell."

"Well," he asked, "why, for instance, have you left the boot shop?"

"The man that ran it couldn't behave; he gave me a hell of a time, one way and another—so I chucked it."

"Dear me—how very wrong of him!"

"Oh, he wasn't out of the ordinary," she said, "but it got too thick in the end. Then I went back to father; that was worse—almost. He kicks me out every morning to look for a job. If I come back before six I get kicked out again; rotten—but of course he's quite right. He can't keep us."

"But why not?"

"Well, he drinks, you see; that's awful expensive."

"But he oughtn't to drink."

"No. But it's his own money."

There was a long silence. Suddenly the Duke spoke, almost viciously, to himself.

"Poor little devil!" he said; then he resumed his silence.

"By the way," he began, a moment or two later, "have you had tea yet?"

She eyed him sharply.

"No," she said. He wasn't the man to guess that she had not had lunch either.

He rose. "Let us go and get some tea," he said. "I believe there is a place in the Gardens." She got up and a smile played round her lips.

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"You're leaving your hat again," she said.

He picked it up.

"You have not told me your name," he began after a moment; "not that I have any right to ask it, or that names are in the least important. I once knew a man called William Sykes who was a churchwarden, and very clever at his job, I believe. Whereas my agent, who was called Pomeroy, turned out to be married to practically every woman he knew. He had to go. It was a pity, because he was a good agent."

She laughed merrily, and he seemed surprised.

"He ought to have been a good husband," she said, "with so much practice."

"Yes," answered the Duke, "but the more a man knows about women the less is he considered fit for married life. Personally, I know nothing about women, but as a husband I should be positively comic."

They sat down at the usual inadequate table.

"My name," she said, "is Molly Shine; and I'm going to eat a hell of a tea. May I?"

"Of course," he answered, and signaled to a passing waitress.

"You're a godsend," said Molly simply; "that's what you are."

"Everybody in the world," he said, "is a godsend; and ninety per cent. forget it at the age of seven. Personally, I like the world. I don't see why we are here if we don't."

"I hate it," she said.

"Why?"

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"I don't know. Perhaps——" She looked into his eyes. "Oh, well, perhaps I don't hate it as much as I think. Go on talking. I want to eat, and I like your talk."

"How charming of you!" he said. "My relations hate it. My sister says that so long as I hold my tongue and obey my valet, I'm possible; otherwise, no. Thank God, I'm not called upon to say what I think about her. Her poor husband died from syncope. I always say he died from being overwhelmed. However, she's an awfully nice woman, I expect, if one knew her."

"But didn't you say she was your sister?"

He poured some tea into his saucer.

"Does one ever know one's relations really well? You don't mind this, do you? It's so hot!" He drank from the saucer like a large, good-natured cat. She laughed.

"Do they do that in Piccadilly?" she asked.

"Probably not," he said. "I don't think Society has the slightest conception of what comfort is."

"What is it?" she asked, a little wistfully.

"It consists largely in drinking one's tea from the saucer when it is too hot, and keeping one's ideas to oneself when they are too unusual. Society is afraid to do the one and unable to do the other."

He broke off and suddenly stared at her.

"I say," he began, "will you think me very rude if I ask you what time you had lunch?"

She laughed. "Yesterday," she said, and bit deeply into a dreadful pastry.

A DUKE

He seemed to reflect deeply for some moments.

"That," he said at last, "seems very wrong of someone."

"Yes," she said; "but, crikes! there are lots worse off than I am. We can't all have enough to do as we like."

"And what would you like?"

"Two pounds a week."

"Then what would you do?"

"I'd read books. Not good books. Silly books: like this." She showed a popular shilling novel which she was carrying.

"Why not good books?"

"Well, I don't know—good books don't seem human. I like books where people love each other ridiculously, and do foolish, romantic things they'd get six months for; in the good books they do get six months—and I hate that."

"You don't like things to be realistic."

"I don't believe it is—I can't pronounce that word properly. It isn't real, not to be sentimental—is it?"

He laughed.

"I don't know," he said, "a sentimental Duke sounds ridiculous."

"Well," she said, "isn't a Duke ridiculous, anyway?"

"I suppose so," he answered. "But then you like the ridiculous?"

"Yes," she said, "and I adore Dukes; all the silliest books are crammed with Dukes."

"You're not a bit like the ordinary shop-girl,"

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he said slowly. It was part of his nature that this should strike him for the first time, now.

"Well, you're not like an ordinary peer—not that I've ever met any—but you aren't. There are freaks in every job. There was a boy in the grocer's near us who became a senior—what is it?—sums and things."

"A senior wrangler?"

"Yes. In the end he chloroformed his landlady. So you see you can't have it both ways. If he hadn't been the sort of man to chloroform people he wouldn't have been senior wrangler."

The Duke lit a cigarette and puffed thoughtfully. She stretched out her legs and put her hands to the back of her neck. A feeling of contentment was stealing over her like a warm bath. This man was so safe. She did not have to be continually fencing with him, as was so often the case. It was almost like talking to a nice old gentleman, though she thought, as she stole a glance at him over the rim of her teacup, he couldn't be more than, say, thirty-eight. It was very wrong, of course, to return a gentleman his hat and then make an enormous tea at his expense. Her mother, who was one of those women who has her cross to bear and advertises the same in and out of season, would have wept tears of real distress had she learned of her daughter's behavior. Mrs. Shine believed in Hell and red devils with as profound a conviction as she believed in St. Paul's Cathedral. Mr. Shine, who became more and more righteous with every glass of beer he drank, would have thrashed Molly and apolo-

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gized to her in the morning. He was probably a better specimen of human nature than his wife. Anyway, Molly had a respect for her father not entirely based upon the strength of his arm. She herself had managed to grow out of that lazy habit of dropping aitches which permeated her family. For this alone she was suspected by her relations.

Molly was a clever girl, in the sense that she viewed life from a more or less reasonable standpoint without giving up her own secret and incurable passion—Romance. The room she shared with her sister, who was learning “shorthand” and talked about “commerce,” very often hid under the pillow nearest the little window a torn volume of Grimm’s Fairy Tales. When this was discovered it was thrown contemptuously out, and Molly was told to “fit herself for life; not being one as could afford dreamin’.” But she used to retrieve the book without losing her temper and hide it away again till next time. She believed everybody could afford to dream; some less than others, that was all.

But things in the Shine household were getting very bad. Mr. Shine was drinking more than usual and consequently earning less. Gladys, the other daughter, was not old enough to do anything else than talk of the things she’d do later, and Molly was looked upon as the staff which should support her parents. This she was signally failing to do. “She’ll never be nothing but a waster”—that was the mother’s final verdict, sandwiched in between two readings from the Bible, which was seldom out of her hands. She regarded it as a sort of pass-

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port. But what really irritated the Shine family was that, though they would never admit it even to each other, they knew that Molly had more intelligence than all the rest of them put together.

The Duke woke up from his reverie with a start.

"I beg your pardon," he said; "I am keeping you."

She laughed.

"Don't be silly!" she said. He paid the bill and rose. She hesitated, hardly knowing what to do.

"What made you so dumb all at once?" she said.

He turned.

"I was wondering," he said, "how it is possible for people to exist who want to read books and can't." He had become serious all at once. "It is as if you stood outside the Golden Gate and nobody handed you the key. Good God—and there is only one in a thousand that notices the Golden Gate is there at all!" Suddenly he faced round. "Books, ideas, dreams—stick to them, cling to them, my child, even if you lose everything else. Dreams, good dreams, are all that are left to us. Civilization has swept away the rest. But the knight of to-day, though he wear a morning coat, may still keep armor on his soul. I believe that—don't you?"

"I believe there are good men," she said simply.

"Try to believe that always, and you have made a success of life. May I have your address?"

She hesitated.

'A DUKE

"I should like to send you some books—silly books."

She smiled.

"You are very kind," she said. "It's No. 3 Ball Street, Bermondsey."

He wrote it down on a card.

She smiled again.

"Will they be really silly books?" she asked.

"The very silliest," he returned; "some of those are the most sensible. I knew a dancer once dressed in the most ridiculous tinsel and stuff. There was a fire, and she gave her life to save her partner. Some of the silly books are like that; they may be ridiculous, but they are not anemic."

He held out his hand.

"I must go," he said. "I have some notes to make among the smaller snakes. Good-by!" He took off his hat.

"Good-by!" said Molly.

He turned his back and walked away down the path. His hat was still in his hand, for he had forgotten to replace it, and his rather thick brown hair stirred a little in the wind. As he got farther away she suddenly heard him burst out with the snatch of a song.

It is given to some women to see visions. As the Duke swung round a corner, out of sight, Molly suddenly saw a vision of his soul. And behold! it was the soul of a child. And suddenly, with a wild little pang of regret, she realized that he was a Duke. A lump rose in her throat and she brushed the tears angrily from her eyes. She

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turned determinedly round, and then suddenly addressed a tree.

"I have seen him at last," she said; "but I shall never see him again."

Then she laughed.

"You must fit yourself for life, Molly," she said, "or you'll get a hell of a thin time."

She walked briskly to the gates and turned her face toward Bermondsey.

"La! la! la!" sang the Duke at the top of his voice as he turned again into the Snake House. A rude boy laughed and was hurried away by his nurse, who looked over her shoulder apprehensively.

"Henry!" The voice cut in upon the Duke from nowhere. "Put on your hat and stop singing."

He looked round hastily, and saw a matronly looking woman of forty, behind whom stood a dozen very awed-looking little girls whose frocks were clean enough to make it quite certain that they were unhappy.

"My dear Octavia," said the Duke, "what are you doing here?"

Then he put on his hat.

Lady Octavia Blake was the Duke of Wynnninghame's sister. She was what the Duke called an "overwhelmer." Her method was a terrific avalanche of words, a quick breath, and then another larger avalanche. It was a method that was generally completely successful. At any rate, it went far toward killing her husband, who was, without doubt, a bore. Lady Octavia was very

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worldly and very cynical. At the same time she did a great deal of good, not by stealth, but mostly on committees. One of her great passions was organization. It was an ambition of hers to organize Henry into a real Duke.

"It happens," said Lady Octavia, in answer to the Duke's question, "to be my turn for the Children's Occasional Treat Society; that is why I am here. It is lucky you have turned up, for now instruction can be combined with amusement, and you can tell these children everything about snakes."

The Duke looked at the small girls, who looked more awed and more starched than ever.

"But are they happy?" he said slowly.

"Of course they are," replied Octavia. "They are having a treat."

"That proves nothing," said the Duke. "I remember having a tremendous treat when I was a boy and being taken to see 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.' I was in tears almost the whole time."

"Don't be absurd, Henry! What do you think the organization is for except to make them happy?" Lady Octavia took a long breath. "You are one of those men who like to turn everything upside down. I've told you of it again and again. You believe in indiscriminate charity. Don't deny it, Henry—you do! Very well, it's a vice. It's just as much a vice as drinking too much. It's as wrong to be extravagant in the East End as it is in the West. Everything should be organized; you should be organized. Somebody should come and marry you, and see that you produce children and a

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home and a fireside and all that. Then you'd mean something. As it is, it takes you and a whole staff of servants to live one life—your life. That's all wasted effort—and why? Lack of organization!"

Here one of the smaller girls burst out crying.

"If you cry, Milly," said Octavia, "you won't go for the next treat. You're not here to cry—you're here to enjoy yourself. Now," she said, addressing the small crowd in general, "this gentleman is going to tell you all about snakes."

"No, I'm not, Octavia," said the Duke. "There are heaps of things about snakes that it would not be fit for them to hear."

"Well, then, you can tell them the rest."

"No, Octavia."

"Really, Henry, you are too obstinate! Why ever not?"

The Duke threw away his cigarette.

"Because it would bore them to distraction, Octavia; and I know of no greater crime than to bore a child."

Lady Octavia snorted.

"They've got to be bored," she declared, "if they're ever to learn anything. Weren't you bored the whole time you were at Eton, Henry?"

"Of course I wasn't," said the Duke. "On Sunday afternoons we were left entirely alone for two hours."

She sighed.

"Oh, well," she said at last, "I suppose you are incorrigible. Are you going to the Paris Biologists' Conference?"

A DUKE

"I am—on Friday week."

"You'll make a fool of yourself there, Henry."

"Very probably, Octavia," said the Duke dryly. He turned to the children. "Try to be happy," he said. "Look hard at the animals and forget everything else. It's quite possible to enjoy oneself even on a treat." He took off his hat to Octavia. "I hope everybody is well at the Towers," he added.

"Oh, yes," returned Octavia. "But Gerald talks less sense and stoops more every day."

"Ah!" murmured the Duke as he walked away. "He ought to have been organized."

He made what notes he had to make and turned toward home. He left his hat with the lizards and his stick among the toads; but that was nothing at all unusual, and, besides, he had a great many hats.

As a taxi took him back to Piccadilly, he sat for some time gazing at the imitation flowers in front of him. His thoughts went back to Molly, standing outside the Golden Gate. "Poor little devil!" he said; then he saw again the rows of awed and starched little girls with big foreheads and exiguous plaits. He sighed. "Poor little devils!" he said. In a sense they were both victims of organization. Molly and the children.

When the taxi arrived at Wynninghame House, he put his hand in his pocket and found that he had no money.

A grave-faced valet in a navy blue suit came down and paid the fare.

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The Duke looked at him and remembered that he, too, was part of an organization.

"You know, Dunn," he said, "Lady Octavia is not altogether wrong——" He stopped, then strode forward up the steps. "But she's wrong," he shouted, "that I'll swear to."

Professor Peter Graine was standing in the study at Wynninghame House. He was a close friend of the family and especially of Henry, who was, except for their mutual passion for reptiles, his exact opposite. Peter was a short, bald man of sixty, and facts and figures were his gods. He was a Doctor of Science and a great many other things. In fact, he was positively loaded with recognitions, from all over the world, of the fact that when two and two were added together by him they invariably made four. Henry, on the other hand, as often as not would bring out the answer as five: result, no recognitions. At the same time, with the Duke, one could not help feeling that possibly one day five would turn out to be the right answer all along. He was always on the edge of a great discovery. But Peter played the safer game of making certainties more certain. Wherefore he was a success, whereas Henry, in so far as a Duke may be called a failure, was not.

The Duke came in through a pair of enormous double doors and threw his notebook on the table.

"Hullo, Peter!" he said. "I'm going to Paris to-morrow."

"To-morrow?" said the Professor. "But why

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on earth? The Conference does not sit till Friday week."

The Duke flung himself into a chair.

"I met Octavia at the Zoo; whenever I meet Octavia I have a tremendous desire to leave the country at once." He waved an arm as if brushing away something unpleasant. "Very wrong of me, of course. But she creates an atmosphere—of—of being buried alive."

"Octavia, Henry," said Graine slowly, "is an eminently sensible woman. Personally, I have the greatest respect for her judgment on any subject."

"Yes, yes," said the Duke. "But I always look at people from the point of view of what sort of figure they would cut in Heaven. Now, Octavia——" He broke off. "Anyway," he said suddenly, "why shouldn't I go to Paris?"

Peter Graine said nothing.

"The question is," the Duke went on, "will you come, too?"

"You certainly can't go alone, Henry. If there is one city in the world where they know how to make hay while the sun shines, it is Paris. You would give away all your money and probably become involved in a scandal."

"In other words," said the Duke imperturbably, "you wish to come."

Peter Graine moved across to the window and sighed.

"Paris is a delightful city," he said. "I don't see that a week's rest will do us any harm before the Conference."

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The Duke laughed.

"You are, I believe, sixty years old, Peter," he said; "yet Paris means to you restaurants, farces, and frocks, and your idea of a rest—well, it always leaves you only fit for a complete change."

"I admit it," said Graine. "I like color and wine and women; and so long as they like me I shall refuse to admit that I am an old man."

"Ah, well! Everyone to his taste."

Graine swung round.

"You affect to despise all that, Henry, because you are cold-blooded. Pah! You don't know how to live! You dream and dream, and what is left? Nothing. A dream doesn't even leave a memory." He banged his fist on the table. "And because you have the emotions of a fish, you count it a virtue. Pooh! Heaven save me from the man who has never been drunk!"

"I do not in the least consider myself virtuous," replied the Duke mildly, "even if I am a fish—which, by the way, I deny. But your commercialized pleasures merely leave you a cynic. You know the price of so many things that you imagine everything has a price. As a matter of fact, there is an enormous amount of amusement to be got out of complete ignorance of the world. I feel positive Hans Andersen knew that. I would rather have written the tale about the 'Tin Soldier' than the whole of Darwin's works."

"That is ridiculous."

"Of course it is. So am I. Why can't you leave a man to his own particular brand of folly?"

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We will go to Paris. You shall get drunk, and I will remain in the hotel and be ridiculous."

"I don't get drunk."

"Exhilarated, then. I am sure you could tell me the precise difference in price between exhilaration and drunkenness."

"Henry, you annoy me."

"It is one of my ridiculous forms of amusement."

"I shall not pander to it. Anyone would think you were a perfect fool. I shall go out to the pond and look at the tadpoles; at any rate, they don't make idiotic remarks."

"Neither do they get drunk—yet I suppose tadpoles have vices. I wonder what they are?"

Peter Graine snorted his disgust and passed out of the room.

"You're coming to Paris to-morrow, Peter?" the Duke shouted after him.

"Of course," answered the Professor.

The Duke sat down again and slowly filled his pipe. For a man of thirty-eight his life had been one of no little achievement. He had done none of the things that everybody does. He had never published a book, written a play, or even attended the House of Lords. But the hum of Piccadilly, which he could hear faintly in his study, still sounded to him like laughter, and in the sea of faces which he saw in the streets he could still detect smiles which other men could not see. And this is an achievement. True, his optimism had been largely fostered by a studied policy of living the life of a hermit, as far as possible. But it is very hard for

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a peer to be an anchorite, and Piccadilly is not the best place for the cloistered life. Therefore, he may be counted to have achieved something. Most of his family considered him a little mad.

His niece Mary, who was just passing through one of the most virulent attacks of Romance that even nineteen is exposed to, had once said that Uncle Henry was a dear. To which her mother, Lady Octavia, had replied that she never had been able to understand why he hadn't had it knocked out of him at Eton. In that remark her whole outlook was embodied. Lady Octavia was a capable woman; in her own sex she might have forgiven the kind of incompetence which is so often fascinating. Even then she would only have forgiven it as being part of a bag of tricks which go toward making a woman charming and marriageable. In a male, of course, it could serve no purpose and was unforgivable. And in addition to that it made a man a continual source of alarm. Lady Octavia could never be quite certain that Henry would not do something grotesque. Her own boy, Gerald, was to succeed to the title, as it was inconceivable that Henry would ever do anything so orthodox as to have a son. She was the first to acknowledge that Gerald was utterly fatuous, but she considered he would make a much better head of the family. At any rate, Gerald's trousers never bagged at the knees.

The Duke touched a bell on his right. Almost immediately the valet, Dunn, came in.

"We are going to Paris to-morrow, Dunn."

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"Very good, your Grace."

"And I wish you to take a note."

The valet picked up a book from the table.

"I wish two pounds a week sent to this address," the Duke went on. "Miss Shine, 3 Ball Street, Bermondsey. In the first instalment you will enclose a note which I will write now."

He sat down at the table and wrote a few lines. The valet remained like a statue opposite him. Suddenly the ghost of a smile sped over his face as he watched his master. The student of psychology might have noticed something maternal in it.

The Duke finished his note and handed it to Dunn.

"Is it going to be a fine evening, Dunn?" he asked.

"I think so, your Grace." The Duke turned to the window.

"Have you ever reflected upon the significance of a fine evening?"

"No, your Grace."

"It means, Dunn, that more people in the world are laughing than crying."

"And a wet one, your Grace?"

"Have you ever noticed how often a wet day breaks in the evening? It is nature turning optimist at the last minute—at least, if it isn't it ought to be."

"Yes, your Grace."

He turned back from the window.

"Well, well. We go to Paris to-morrow, and I shall have to behave myself."

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The valet went out by the big doors, closing them noiselessly behind him.

The Duke mechanically swept up some papers from his table.

Then the door opened, and a young man of some twenty summers came in, in evening dress.

"Why, Gerald," said the Duke, "what are you doing in town?"

The young man laughed. He had a pleasant laugh and a pleasant face, but his physique was frail, and he had the air of a self-indulgent boy.

"Oh, the usual thing."

"And what is that?"

"Girls. Can you let me have a couple of fivers, Uncle Henry? The banks are closed, you know. I just blew in. I thought you might be here." He sat down at the table and drew out a check-book. The Duke unlocked a drawer.

"Girls!" he said. "How very important women seem to be!"

"They are," said Gerald simply, taking the two five-pound notes his uncle was holding out to him. The Duke smiled.

"Are you in love, Gerald?" he asked.

"Well, yes, but there's no need to tell anyone," he hesitated. "She's the finest little woman in the world, Uncle Henry," he said suddenly, "and she's promised to be my wife."

"My dear boy, how splendid!" The Duke took his hand. Gerald looked down.

"If you ever hear anyone say anything against her, don't you believe 'em."

A DUKE

"But why should anyone say anything against her?"

"Oh, I don't know; people are such cads, you know."

"And what is her name?"

"I'm not telling anyone that yet—in fact, I'm not telling anyone I'm engaged at all." He looked suddenly up. "Especially not the mater," he added.

"But why not?"

The boy hesitated.

"She wouldn't understand," he said. "You'll keep the secret, Uncle Henry."

"Of course," said the Duke as Gerald went to the door. "Give the lady my best wishes, please."

Gerald turned.

"I will," he said. "You're a damned good sort, Uncle Henry. I wish you could fall in love—it's tophole. But you aren't made that way, are you?" He went out, passing Peter Graine in the doorway. They exchanged the usual greetings, and Peter came in.

"What's Gerald doing in town, Henry?" he said, selecting a cigarette from a box on the mantelpiece.

"Oh—amusing himself," said the Duke.

Graine grunted.

"Getting into trouble, I expect," he said.

"Well, my dear Peter, everybody has a perfect right to do that. And people who are going to Paris in the morning shouldn't throw stones."

The Professor laughed.

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"All right, Henry," he said, "it's nothing to do with me—I'm not his uncle."

"Are you dining here, Peter?"

"Please."

There was a long silence. The Duke was staring out of the window. It was certainly a fine evening, but a long line of rain-clouds lay low down in the east. Peter came silently up behind him. Suddenly the Duke stretched out his arms.

"A glorious evening!" he said. "It makes one feel all is right with the world. Ah, Peter, what a thing it is to live! To think 'I will go to Paris' and to go! To feel hungry, and to eat! To feel thirsty, and to drink! What are your amusements compared with that? A wonderful sky! There are very few tears being shed to-night." He pointed to the clouds on the horizon. "Where are those, Peter?"

The Professor thought for a moment.

"That is the east," he said slowly.

The Duke's hand fell to his side.

"Ah!" he said. "Bermondsey way."

Peter Graine stared at him; the Duke went slowly to the door; then he turned.

"What a thing, Peter!" he said. "To see the Golden Gate and have no key! Poor little devil!"

He went out. The Professor looked after him a moment; then he shrugged his shoulders. Henry was always inexplicable.

CHAPTER II

MR. AND MRS. SHINE

GLADYS SHINE, sitting on the end of her bed, glowered, in a thoroughly pre-breakfast state of mind, at Molly's back.

"Well," she said at last, "ow long are you going to be with the glass, your Ladyship?"

"I've got more hair to do than you," returned Molly complacently. "It didn't take me nearly so long when I was a flapper."

"Flapper!" snorted the other. "My hair's going up at Christmas——" She stopped abruptly. "Did you get a job yesterday?" she said.

"No," answered Molly shortly.

"Hum!" said the other. "Father won't 'alf be pleased."

"Jobs don't grow on trees," said Molly, as she put the finishing touches to her toilet.

"What about Sid Goyle?" The question came suddenly from the younger girl. Molly suddenly clenched her hands.

"Well, what about him?"

"'E'd marry you—that's what about him."

"Think so?"

"I don't think—I know. What's more, so does mother and father. I 'eard father say last night, if you couldn't get a job——" She stopped.

"Well?" said Molly.

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"You'd better marry 'im," went on Gladys imperturbably. She couldn't see from where she was standing the sudden tightening of the muscles, the slight contraction of the lips, and the smoldering fury in Molly's eyes. She went on, evenly.

"What's wrong with 'im?" she said. "'E's got enough to keep you, and if 'e thinks it worth it. I know father does. And think of a wedding!" she added enthusiastically.

There was a moment or two of complete silence. The alarm clock on the stained mantelpiece ticked on monotonously.

"You beast!" said Molly suddenly. "Oh, you beast!" The door banged behind her, and Gladys heard her footsteps hurrying down the stairs. The younger girl shrugged her shoulders; it was the gesture of a woman of the world.

When Molly entered the little sitting-room, it was empty. The cloth, remaining on the table from last night's supper, was still covered with crumbs and litter. Molly removed these, and, going to the sideboard, a peculiar erection of yellow wood, began to lay the breakfast. This the two girls took it in turns to do.

As she put the crockery on the table, every piece seemed to be a memorial of some dreadful meal; meals when her father had been drunk and her mother in tears; maudlin meals, violent meals, or just silent, dull meals. There was a piece off the spout of the tea-pot which had led to a terrible scene between husband and wife. It had been a long time ago, that scene, and had since been many

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times repeated, but Molly remembered it for the reason that the occasion had been the first that she had realized the sort of existence her parents led. The impression had stuck.

Strange to say, the personal memories of the pieces of china affected Molly a great deal more than the jarring and hideous decoration of the room itself. She was used to oleographs of swans with necks that were too long, or of lovers with smiles that were too sickly. They did not offend her. She never considered whether they were beautiful or not. If she had she would probably have thought them "all right"; but, for all that, she could show enthusiasm for a beautiful sky or even the green of an anemic tree in an East End square. Her sense of beauty, except for a vague longing after something other than dulness, was not developed.

Her mother, wearing her usual pained look of astonishment, though she no longer had the spirit to be astonished at anything, came in, finishing her dressing in the doorway. She sat down heavily on a chair and sighed. It was her method of beginning another day.

"Eggs on?" she said.

"No," said Molly, diving for the cruet.

"Your father'll be down in five minutes. Sam don't like to be kept waiting." Molly went out of the room, and in a few moments the sizzling eggs could be heard. When the eggs had almost arrived at the precise pitch of perfection which Molly knew her father required of them, she heard a heavy

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footstep just behind her. She turned. Samuel Shine stood there regarding her with his heavy red-rimmed eyes.

"Take 'em off now," he said. Molly removed the eggs. Then she noticed that her father was carrying the shilling novel she had had at the Zoo.

"I found this last night," he said slowly, "be'ind the clock. Is it yours?"

"Yes, father."

"When I sent you out yesterday to look for a job I gave you a bob to get your food. You bought this muck instead?"

"Yes, father."

He regarded her steadily for some time. When he was sober—in the mornings, that is to say—she puzzled him; at night, when he was drunk, she irritated him.

"'Ow much money 'ave you now?" he said.

"Threepence," said Molly.

"Give it to me," commanded her father, holding out his hand. Molly dived into an elusive pocket and gave it to him.

"To-day," went on Mr. Shine, "you'll just go out without any money—see?"

"Yes, father."

"And you won't come back till supper-time."

"No, father."

"An' you'd better find a job. 'Adn't you?"

"Yes."

"All right; come on with the eggs." The big man turned to go out of the little kitchen.

"May I keep the book, father?" said Molly.

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He turned and looked at her. He was a man with certain elementary notions of justice. She had sold her lunch for the book. It was hers. He held it out to her.

"'Ere you are," he said, "but you'll be bloomin' 'ungry abaht four this afternoon."

She smiled radiantly.

"That's all right," she said. They understood one another, these two. Molly could see that her father had a perfect right to refuse her more money. He could see that the book was hers. Samuel Shine went back into the sitting-room. Molly heard a few words, then an exasperated shout from her father.

"Oh, don't start sniveling, Em, for God's sake!"

As she put the last egg on its dish she smiled.

"I believe I'd get drunk myself if I was him," she murmured to herself, and carried the breakfast in to her parents.

Gladys had come down and was pouring out tea.

As Molly took her place her mother looked up from her cup.

"Young Mr. Goyle came in yesterday," she said. There was dead silence.

"I think you might answer when I speak to you," went on Mrs. Shine in a peevish tone.

Molly looked up.

"I didn't know you were talking to me," she said.

"Yes, you did," said her father; "didn't you?"

Molly said nothing.

"Come on," said her father; "I want an answer."

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"Yes," said Molly.

"Then don't tell lies," said Mr. Shine in his husky voice.

"I don't know what will become of you, I'm sure," sniveled her mother. "Only last Sunday in chapel we was being told about it. 'Those that lie'll perish'—that's what the minister said."

"Then you do know what'll become of me," said Molly. "I'll perish."

Mrs. Shine threw up her hands.

"Is there any woman 'oo's cross is as 'eavy to bear as mine?" she cried. "My own daughter one of those that scoff in the market-place and take the Lord's name in vain! And my 'usband as ought to be my shield and buckler will stand by without raising a 'and! There'll be a judgment one day, mark my words!"

"Shut up, Em, and 'old your tongue. Moll, give me that last egg." It was Mr. Shine's way of dealing with the problem, and was completely successful in so far as a heavy silence fell upon the breakfast table. It was broken by the postman's knock.

Molly, being nearest to the door, went out into the narrow passage. The light was bad, and she had almost reached the sitting-room door again before she realized that the single letter was for her. She stopped and turned it over. On the envelop was a little black coronet. Molly stared straight in front of her. . . .

Her father's voice brought her back to herself.

"What on earth are you doing?" he shouted.

She thrust the letter into her frock and went in.

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"There was only one, and it was for me," she said.

"Any work?" said her father.

"No."

"Well, what was it?" came her mother's irritating whine.

"Only from a girl at the boot store."

Molly lied easily and fluently this time. She didn't care whether she perished or not. He had written to her.

Breakfast went on in the usual dismal silence, broken every now and then by one of Mrs. Shine's automatic sighs. For Molly, the whole room had grown suddenly larger, its three other inmates were no longer there, the yellow vases that flanked the clock on the mantelpiece had turned the duller yellow of gold, and through the cheap looking-glass on the wall she seemed to see long pergolas of sun-lit flowers that died away in a riot of color and loveliness—the garden of a fairy palace.

It was only the reflection from the door which she had left slightly ajar, but it does not matter what things are; it is what they seem that counts.

Molly was suddenly living in a world where nothing was so unreal that it could not happen, nor anything so real that it could not be dispensed with at will. The most ordinary things had become wonderful; the most wonderful things had become ordinary.

He had written to her.

The meal came to an end, and Mrs. Shine and Gladys disappeared to wash up.

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Samuel Shine slowly filled a large pipe with tobacco of a suspiciously dark color. Suddenly he spoke.

"About young Goyle," he said. Molly waited. "I dare say you know 'e's got a 'ankering after you?"

"He hasn't said so."

"You've only got to look at 'im a bit, and 'e would."

"Perhaps he would."

"Well, then?"

"I couldn't marry him, father." She spoke with a quiet determination. She wanted to avoid a scene.

"Supposing I said you was to?"

"I should disobey you."

"Would you? You don't think you owe anything to your parents, I suppose?"

"Not that."

"I've reared you and I've kept you, my girl, and now you're throwin' over your job because you couldn't keep a man in 'is place, which is a thing any girl's supposed to be able to do. An' there comes along a man like young Sid Goyle, 'oo can keep you, and won't knock you about if you be'ave yourself—and you say 'No.' You'll just go on living on your father. Well, it won't do."

There was a long silence. Then Molly spoke. Her hand clutched a little nervously at her breast, where lay the unopened letter.

"I will never marry Mr. Goyle, father," she said, "not even if you were to turn me into the

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streets; he is a nice man, I dare say, but I don't love him, and I never could."

"'Ow do you know?" said her father. "You don't love anyone else, do you? 'Ow do you know you couldn't never love Sid Goyle?"

Molly's hand felt the letter lying in her frock.

"I just do know," she said simply.

Her father swung round.

"Damn you all!" he said. "I don't know what to do with you." He turned again. "Well, get out," he shouted; "get out, and get a job of your own!"

Molly turned to the door; as she was going out she heard his voice again.

"Moll," he said, "I'm sorry, girl—I didn't mean to speak to you like that. I'm getting old, and the drink's breaking me up, too. And Em—my God, Em! If you only knew what she was at night—it's hell and wickedness and Bible talk all the time. I sometimes wonder 'ow long I'll keep my 'ands off Em."

He stopped, and a pathetic little smile twisted his lips.

"But she weren't always this way," he said. "I find I love her better when I'm drunk; I can think she's the old Em then."

Molly came back.

"Poor old father!" she said. "I'm sorry! You and I understand each other a bit, don't you think? Do you remember the day I ran out of church when the man said the world was a nest of vipers?"

The man shook his head.

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"I remember. I beat you, Moll."

"Yes; but we kissed each other good-night, didn't we?"

"I'm a rotten lot, Moll," he said, "and the drink's got me; I'll get worse, you'll see, instead of better. But you're a good girl—thank God!—though I don't deserve it." He put his hand into his pocket.

"Here," he said, holding out a shilling, "I can't get 'appily drunk if I know you ain't going to have any dinner."

She took it and kissed him. She felt dreadfully soft, dreadfully wicked.

"I hope you get awful happily drunk," she said in a whisper. Somehow she felt that *was* the best she could wish him.

She turned into the passage.

"I'll come back with a job to-day," she said. "You see if I don't."

She heard his heavy footsteps going up the stairs as she went out, and as she closed the door she heard her mother's whining voice calling from the kitchen: "Sam! Sam!"

Molly almost ran up the street.

Samuel Shine was a cabinet-maker and very clever at his trade. When he worked his work was such that his employers overlooked his irregularities, and were only too anxious to secure his services. Some years ago he had a windfall from an old relation and had bought a small annuity. It was not enough to keep him, of course, but it was enough to make him take weeks, sometimes months even, of what

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he called holiday. Among his acquaintances these were called drinking bouts.

Now he went upstairs, shaved himself, put some money in his pocket from a cheap cash-box, stole quietly downstairs, and disappeared for the day. When next he should be seen at Number Three, it would be an entirely different man.

Molly walked some way before she opened her letter. She looked at the handwriting and wondered that it was so good. He hadn't seemed that kind of man.

Then she opened the envelop. Postal orders for two pounds were inside.

For a moment she went hot all over. She was bitterly, dreadfully ashamed. It was as if she had begged from him. What could he think of her, to send her money like that? She crushed the orders in her hand.

Of course, that wasn't his writing. He had simply told someone to send it. She was just a charity. Well, she thought to herself, why should she hope he would regard her as anything else? She was too shabby to be suspected of pride, after all.

Then she discovered the note inside. Her fingers trembled as she drew it out. It was very short and dreadfully badly written, but she smiled when she read the quaint sentences, and her anger vanished as if at a magic touch.

"DEAR MISS SHINE" (he had written), "I believe you said two pounds a week would buy you a sufficient number of silly books. Please allow me

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to be your librarian to that extent. I should be so proud to feel that someone was looking upon me as a dream-monger. Will you? It is going to be a fine evening, thank God.

"Yours very truly,

"WYNNINGHAME."

She read the little letter again and again. Her dream-monger! It seemed a wonderful word to her; it made her feel that London was a little place, and that she had a great many friends. She climbed on to a 'bus and after a long ride reached Regent's Park. She walked to the seat where he had sat down with her, and she began to think. She couldn't take the money, of course. And yet—what would he think of her if she didn't? He would think she was just a conventional, silly girl who was afraid of the dreams she professed to love. But what would the family say? She saw no reason why they should know—she could think of some story or other. But if she refused, the last—the only link between her and her dream-monger would be broken. She wouldn't—she couldn't refuse. You see, poor Molly hung on to her star with a pathetic indifference to her difficulties. Whatever happened, she was determined that he should never think she was afraid. His own words kept ringing in her head: "Dreams—stick to them, cling to them, my child, even if you lose everything else." And she was going to cling to them, she said. She wouldn't acknowledge that it was to him she was clinging.

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She went out of the Park and bought some paper and envelops, then she sat down and began to think of what she should say to him. Finally she wrote this, with a badly sucked pencil:

"DEAR SIR,—I ought not to take it. But, if you please, I will and thank you.

"MOLLY SHINE

"P. S.—I am afraid I do not know how to address a Duke."

The envelope she addressed to—

"The Duke,

"Wynninghame House,

"Piccadilly."

And she determined to deliver her note there herself. She wanted the little thrill of seeing where he lived, quite close.

She walked to Piccadilly and stopped outside the great gates with the two lions on their tops. Somehow it looked much too like a prison for a dream-monger to lodge there. Then she took her courage in both hands and walked up the step to the large front doors. She turned a little white as she pressed the bell, and her heart seemed to stand quite still when they swung back and revealed a grave-looking man-servant. Somewhere in there, she thought, he is sitting with his books—roomfuls of them; and his dreams—universes of them.

She handed her note to the man.

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"Please, sir," she said, "is the Duke of Wynnninghame at home?"

"No, miss," he answered her. "His Grace left for Paris this morning."

Left! The palace was there, but the magician was away. Paris? He might just as well have been in the Antipodes. He was gone. London got larger and larger till it was all Bermondsey. Even tears came into her eyes.

"Shall I leave him this note, miss?" the man was saying.

"Yes, yes," she stammered, feeling her face growing red. The doors shut and she went slowly down the steps. Of course, why should he be there? Mentally, she shook herself for behaving like a child. Only, she had been imagining him inside, all the way from Regent's Park; and it had been a sudden shock to her to find the palace empty.

As she drifted out into Piccadilly, a curious thought struck her. Paris! In the silly books a great deal was said about Paris. She found herself hoping he had not a large connection as a dream-monger; in fact, that she was his only client. She had to laugh at herself, but it wasn't a very satisfactory laugh.

Meanwhile, her little note, placed on the Duke's desk by a careless man-servant, slipped into the waste-paper basket, and left Wynnninghame House almost as soon as it had entered it.

CHAPTER III

THE GOLDEN TOAD

THE DUKE lay back in his chair at the hotel in Paris; his eyes were closed and his finger-tips pressed lightly together. On the other side of the mantelpiece Peter Graine was talking.

"You have made an absolute fool of yourself, Henry," he was saying. "Here we have all the modern scientists that matter—practically the entire scientific brains of the universe gathered together in one room," he waved an arm, dramatically, "Doussac, Carnforth, Mardovitch, von Rosen—and you stand up and talk absolute rubbish to them for an hour. If you didn't happen to be an English peer you would have been thrown out of the Conference. As it was, von Rosen absolutely pulverized you."

"It is quite easy for a materialist to pulverize anyone," said the Duke, slowly; "equally easily could I have pulverized von Rosen by asking him where the wind started; but one refrains. The victories of facts and figures are the most easily won, but they carry little booty with them. The victories of faith, on the other hand——" He broke off. "I gather you don't believe in the golden toad, then, Peter?"

The Professor gave a short laugh.

"The thing is ridiculous, Henry," he said.

SIMPLE SOULS

"There is no known genus that could produce such a species."

"There is no known personality that produces electricity," murmured the Duke.

Graine snorted. This sort of thing irritated him.

"Look here, Henry," he said. "The whole thing is perfectly obvious to anyone that knows you. This man Cook, in 1883, wrote a letter saying that he captured and lost a toad which was of complete gold coloring. Being fantastic, the thing appeals to you. You write an absurd paper endeavoring to prove the possibility of this phenomenon. Von Rosen refutes the whole thing, and Doussac shows, beyond any doubt, that the man Cook happened to be a confirmed drunkard. There you are!"

"Perhaps, if Doussac could have shown that Cook was drunk on the island, but he couldn't. You cannot get whisky on a desert island."

"What is the use of arguing with you?" said the Professor. "In many ways you are a simpleton, Henry. Any beggar in the street can take you in with a plausible tale; a woman or a child can take you in by simply standing and looking at you. You persist in believing that everybody is an angel from heaven. Upon my word, I think the mere fact that it isn't so makes you believe it!"

"The things worth looking for," said the Duke, "are the things that everybody says do not exist; it is obviously dull to find things that you knew all the time were there."

"Anyway," said Graine, "I trust your contribu-

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tion to the Conference will not be reported in the papers."

The Duke rose and knocked out his pipe.

"Would you be surprised to hear," he said, "that I am going to look for my toad?"

"Going to look for it?"

"Certainly. I am going to that island in the South Seas that Cook spoke of. For many reasons, I believe the thing exists. The fact that all those reasons have been refuted by Herr von Rosen and M. Doussac does not disturb me in the least."

"Why?"

"Because I think both von Rosen and Doussac are entirely lacking in imagination. What lies at the root of a good scientist, Pete, though I am perfectly well aware that you will deny it, is imagination. Look at Leonardo da Vinci."

"Leonardo da Vinci was not a scientist."

"Nevertheless, were he to come to life to-day and were you to argue with him on any subject you cared to choose, he would, to use your own phrase, Peter, pulverize you."

"Supposing I were to ask him questions concerning the lateral formation of the hippocampus minor, he would have nothing to say."

"And I hold that any man with imagination and a fluent tongue would find something to say, even about the hippocampus minor, which is a ludicrous thing for anyone to talk about."

Peter Graine smiled.

"Your theory of life, Henry," he said, "would make interesting reading."

SIMPLE SOULS

"I have no theory of life," said the other, "but I have a theory of living—for myself."

"And that is?"

The Duke smiled.

"No, Peter," he said. "If I were to tell you you would only go and warn Octavia about it. All I ask is that when I do something grotesque you will try to bear in mind that somewhere behind that is my theory of living."

He went over to the large window with its violent brocade curtains and yellow tassels and looked out on the people in the streets. He stood there for some time, a little smile playing about his lips.

"*'Plus je vois des hommes, plus j'aime mon chien,'*" he said suddenly. "The man who wrote that should be hanged."

"And how would you alter it?" said the Professor.

"*'Plus je vois des hommes et des animaux, plus j'aime le monde.'*"

Peter Graine laughed.

"*'Et les femmes?'*" he asked.

"*'Mais elles ne sont pas du monde, n'est ce pas?'*" the Duke said, suddenly digging his friend violently in the ribs. "Surely you are not going to waste your last night in Paris?"

"Certainly not," returned the Professor, picking up his cloak. "I have a supper party. You're not really going on an expedition to the South Seas, Henry?"

"Certainly I am."

"But it's absurd."

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"Perhaps; but there is an outside chance in everything. Can you imagine the sensations of the moment when I dangle a golden toad in the face of von Rosen?"

Peter laughed.

"No, I can't," he said.

"Who is the lady to-night, Peter?" asked the Duke as he slid back into his armchair.

"A supper party of young Henry Bourrien. Can't I tempt you to join us?"

"Hardly," returned the Duke. "I am afraid I should find M. Bourrien's friends a little too brilliant for me."

The Professor turned.

"Henry," he said, "it is positively disgusting for a man of your age to be entirely unmoved by the sight of a pretty woman. You talk a great deal about beauty, but you don't know what beauty is. You don't know the difference between a frock from Redfern's and an overall! You are a fish."

He gazed at the Duke, who sat twiddling a paper-knife in his long fingers. Graine frowned.

"What the devil do you think women are for?" he said.

The Duke laid down the paper-knife.

"I think," he said, "that women were created in order to give a man the opportunity of becoming a gentleman."

The Professor made a gesture of disgust, as he opened the door.

"I will tell you," he said, "what is the matter with you. You are a prig, Henry."

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The Duke selected his book from the table.

"There are worse things," he said slowly, "than being a prig."

The door banged, and the outraged Professor stalked out into the night to enjoy himself.

CHAPTER IV

NON SEQUITUR

FOR two weeks everything went as well as possible with Molly. The girl in the draper's up the street fell ill and her position was given to Molly temporarily. Each Saturday she had been able to intercept the post which brought the coronated letter, or explain it as from a girl friend; and her salary from the shop was enough to account for the novels which found their way into her bedroom, though her mother had several Biblical texts to repeat dealing with the subject of extravagance.

It must be admitted that Molly chose her books, at present, almost solely from the pictures on the jackets. It must also be admitted that these generally depicted an almost incredibly athletic-looking man, holding in his arms a woman with a quite impossible complexion. At the same time the contents were generally clean, and somehow the more villainous characters seemed unreal, while the very good and noble people seemed quite possible to Molly. From which you will perceive that she was well fitted to be a brilliant pupil of any dream-monger.

This Saturday afternoon the volume she was bringing home was entitled "The Path of Patricia," and the picture on the cover had suggested to Molly that it might be a pleasant path. As she walked

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along the pavement of Ball Street she felt very happy. It is really rather wonderful to have one's feet in Bermondsey and one's head in Piccadilly; but Molly was accomplishing that feat as she stepped up to the little front door and walked into the sitting-room of Number Three. Once inside, her thoughts came swooping to earth with the speed of an aerial torpedo.

Sidney Goyle was sitting in the armchair, his long legs stretched out on the well-worn rug. He was a young man of twenty-seven, with an anemic face, rather listless gray eyes, and a straggly yellow-brown moustache. He, too, had yearnings after literature, and on that account partly, he considered that he should be attractive in Molly's eyes. But unfortunately Sidney Goyle was not honest with himself; he wished to be thought literary rather than be literary. One of the results of this was that he martyred himself considerably by reading books which he didn't understand and which could give him no satisfaction. But, for all that, he was a nice young man, and had the reputation of being very "steady." As Molly came in the room Mrs. Shine slipped out. Molly knew instinctively that Sidney Goyle was going to propose to her.

"Good afternoon, Miss Shine," he said, getting up awkwardly and speaking in a thin, rather high voice that gave one the idea that he had taken a great deal too much trouble in cultivating it.

"Good afternoon," said Molly, removing the pins from her hat.

"Have you been reading much lately?" he

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said, picking up "The Path of Patricia," which she had placed on the table.

"Oh, only silly books," she said.

Mr. Goyle raised his eyebrows at the picture on the jacket.

"I dare say this is quite good," he said. "I've been reading philosophy lately. Oliver Wendell Holmes, you know."

She didn't know a bit, but she nodded.

"You ought to read a few really good books," he went on; "one gets so much more out of them—they feed one." He gave a little wave of the hand, vaguely. "One gets a bigger grasp," he said.

"Yes," said Molly.

There was a silence.

"I've thought we might read together, perhaps, if you cared to," said Sidney Goyle, with the least possible air of a Mæcenæas.

"Oh! I'd be stupid," she said quickly.

"Pooh!" He waved his hand again. "You're afraid of the good books."

"Perhaps I am," she said. Somehow she didn't see Sidney Goyle as a dream-monger.

"But that's a great mistake, Molly," he said. "I may call you Molly, mayn't I?"

She said nothing. It was coming. Oh! why didn't he get to it at once? Ought she to anticipate him? He was impossible, dreadful—she saw him out of the corner of her eyes. How could he hope to be a dream-monger? He was talking again; she forced herself to listen—to take him seriously.

"I wonder," he was saying, "I wonder if you

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could ever care for me, Molly. We both love books and literature; we have so much in common. I don't want an answer all at once—but if you thought you could—we could get married fairly soon. I could take a little house—we could have a library.”

She saw that little house and shuddered. He was going on talking. Why couldn't she stop him? She felt as if someone had tied her tongue; somehow the whole thing seemed preposterous and grotesque.

He was coming over to her.

“What do you think about it, little woman?” he was saying. “Don't you feel we'd get on fine?”

What was he doing? He was putting his arm round her waist; he was going to kiss her.

“Don't touch me!” she cried suddenly. “How dare you?”

He started back, looking at her as if he couldn't believe his ears.

A sudden wave of pity for him came over her. He had meant to be kind. He didn't know. She put out her hand and took his.

“I'm sorry,” she said; “I didn't mean to be unkind; I couldn't marry you—no,” as she saw he was about to speak, “not if I thought it over for years—I don't love you—I couldn't ever love you. I don't mean to hurt you. . . .”

She went on talking to him, telling him she was honored by his proposal, telling him a great many things which were quite untrue. She felt that whatever happened she must prevent him opening his

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mouth again. And as she talked she did not hear the postman's knock or her mother's footsteps in the passage.

Mrs. Shine took the single letter and, fumbling for her glasses, stared at the address. She saw that it was for Molly, but she had always opened her children's letters without any scruples, and, not knowing this handwriting, she immediately tore open the envelop. Inside were two one-pound postal orders.

Mrs. Shine gazed at them for a moment blankly. Then she turned over the envelop. There was no doubt about it. It was addressed to Molly. She turned it over again, and suddenly her hand fell to her side. She stared straight in front of her, standing quite still, unnaturally still.

This, then, was the secret of these late extravagances! Mrs. Shine had noticed, in her less bitter moments, that her daughter, who seemed to her only yesterday to be a grubby child with one ragged pigtail, was growing into a beautiful woman. In her own mind any kind of beauty was vaguely connected with wickedness; and now . . . She crushed the letter in her yellow, bony hand.

She heard her daughter's voice in the sitting-room. What she was saying she could not hear. A man was proposing to her; Mrs. Shine knew that was going to happen. And now—now Molly was not fit to be the wife of a decent man.

For a moment she thought she was going to faint; it was impossible, incredible. They had always been respectable; her husband's drinking

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bouts belonged to another category in the society she lived in. But this? This meant fingers pointed in scorn, whisperings, even laughter. What would Sam say to this? For a few seconds she stood there realizing the thing that had happened. Gradually a hard light came into her eyes—the light one sees in the eyes of a fanatic.

She turned the handle of the sitting-room door and went in.

There are many people who cannot forgive sins that are beyond repair. When there is nothing to be done but suffer, they are less ready to alleviate that suffering with the balm of understanding. If a murderer could bring his victim back to life, we could find excuses for his mistake. It is the irretrievable that is unforgivable as much in Park Lane as in Stockwell and the Mile End Road, for human forgiveness is as illogical as human punishment and human sin. That is a common enough fault. But Molly's mother was not even of these.

Mrs. Shine was a sort of negative Medea. She was of the blood of those who burned witches and bishops indiscriminately. Her gospel was a gospel of repression. She did not believe that any good could come out of a human being till it had first been driven in with a hammer. With this child the hammer had not been heavy enough—that was all.

Thus, having made up her mind that Molly's soul was irretrievably lost, no thought of trying to find it entered her mind. As she went into the room it is safe to say that Mrs. Shine hated no one so much as her elder daughter.

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Molly still had Sidney Goyle's hand in hers, and was still trying to pour oil on the ruffled waters of that young man's conceit.

"We should hate each other in a week," she was saying. "I'm such a fool, and you are so clever; I know you'll see I'm right when you think it over." She gave a little laugh. "And you wouldn't be able to get rid of me, you know," she added.

"Jezebel!" The word came in a kind of biting whisper from the other side of the deal table. The absurd melodramatic interruption made the two swing round almost simultaneously. For a moment Molly thought her mother was mad. She was standing staring at her, her thin lips almost white and drawn down at the corners with an unnatural tightness; her gray eyes looked like circles of polished granite.

Sidney Goyle's mouth hung open, making him look more than ever like an imbecile.

"Why, mother!" said Molly slowly. "What's the matter with you?"

Mrs. Shine shifted her eyes to the young man.

"Mr. Goyle," she said, "you came 'ere to make an offer of marriage to my daughter; you can take it back; she ain't fit to marry you nor any decent man. I know my duty. The Lord 'as chosen me to tell you the truth an' I'll tell it, if it's my death."

There was a moment's silence.

"Mother," cried Molly suddenly, "are you mad?"

"Better for me if I was—or dead," answered Mrs. Shine. Her expression changed suddenly to

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one of fury. She flung the letter and the two postal orders down on the table.

"'Oo sent you that?" she cried. "'Oo's been sending you two pounds each week, an' you sayin' it's a girl writing from the boot store?" She leaned across the table. "No more lies, if you please—time's past for lying. 'Oo is it?" Her voice sunk to a whisper again. "Is it a man?" she said.

Molly stared stupidly at the orders and the envelop. Somehow she had never pictured it happening like this. The first thing her mother should think of! Her mother . . . It was sordid, horrible. The door had opened, and Gladys was in the room; she realized at once that something dreadful had happened. Molly saw her without taking her eyes off the table. No one moved.

"Is it a man?" her mother repeated in that awful whisper.

Still the hopeless silence. Even the ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece seemed an impertinence. Sidney Goyle all at once took his hand off the sofa back and examined his nails, like a man who feels suddenly awkward at a tea-party. Up the street a man began to whistle. "You Made Me Love You" in a mixture of keys. He came nearer, and Molly recognized her father. He always whistled that when he was fuddled and happy. She suddenly found her voice.

"Yes," she said, "it is a man."

No one moved.

Mr. Shine was passing the window and was humming his song to himself with intense satisfac-

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tion. Sidney Goyle suddenly woke up to the irony of the obbligato.

"My God!" he said, and, turning his back, stared out of the window.

Mrs. Shine opened her mouth to say something, then closed it like a trap as she heard the front door shut. The father was in the passage; he sounded very cheerful. Gladys, standing pressed up against the yellow sideboard, shivered.

A moment later and Mr. Shine was in the room. He saw at once that one of his hated "scenes" was in progress. Samuel Shine hardly ever became really drunk; it is too expensive a proceeding for a seasoned toper. But when he had absorbed a certain amount of alcohol, the soft parts of his nature seemed to merge into a general hard cheerfulness and a capacity for furious anger should anything happen to disturb his good spirits. Now he looked round the room and its motionless occupants with a sort of intuition that something unpleasant was going to be said which would jar upon his artificial cheeriness. A wave of anger came over him. It was uneconomical to get drunk if you were to be annoyed in the process of enjoying it. He turned to his wife.

"What's all this?" he said in a hostile tone.

Mrs. Shine pointed to the papers on the table.

"She's been getting that every week from a man," she said; "that's what it is. Our daughter ain't fit to marry anybody as is honest, any longer." Her husband was looking at the postal orders and the envelop.

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"D'you understand?" she asked shrilly.

He said nothing.

"It's a judgment on us," she went on, with a return to the whine that he knew so well. "The Lord's visited your 'ouse, Sam, with no uncertain 'and. It's a judgment on you that the daughter I bore should be no better than a common ——"

Mr. Shine looked at her.

"I won't 'ave those words used 'ere," he said, and turned to Molly.

"Is this true?" he asked.

She did not answer. Somehow it seemed to her extraordinary that all these people should take this thing for granted. They did not even imagine any other explanation possible. She looked round at them with their shocked, awed faces. How could she tell them the truth? Far from believing it, they wouldn't even understand it.

And yet in a queer way she realized that they were right. It was she who was beating her wings against the bars of the cage that is called the world. Her family all seemed suddenly to have become strangers to her, but she saw that they understood each other, and that it was she who had refused to play the game of life according to the rules. She was a rebel, and rebels are in the wrong when they are in the minority. She had the sense not to pretend to herself that she was a martyr. They were forcing her to play according to rules she had never agreed to; but then, she thought, neither had they. She saw her father's face growing more stern as she did not answer, and she felt somehow

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sorry for him. Her mind traveled back to that afternoon in Regent's Park, and the puzzle became greater still. What had he said? "Dreams—stick to them, cling to them, my child, even if you lose everything else." To her it seemed as if he could not be wrong. And surely this was a good dream!

She looked at her mother, hard, uncompromising. No! she could never tell them. Good or bad, it was her dream, and it would be inevitably soiled if exposed to the light of day. When fairy tales come true they cannot be told.

You cannot serve two masters. As Molly stood there watching her father's face growing harder and harder, she enrolled herself finally and absolutely under the standard of the dream-monger.

"Is this true?" he repeated, and this time she looked him in the face.

"A man sent me that," she said; "yes, that is true; but I have done nothing wrong."

"Done nothing wrong!" Her father repeated her words with a world of scorn in his voice. Then he stuck his hands into his pockets.

"Explain," he said.

"I can't," answered Molly; "you'll just have to take my word for it."

"That a man sends you two pounds a week, and you ain't done wrong? D'you think I'm as simple as that?"

"No," she said, "I don't."

She did not realize the profound truth of what he had said. She just knew that the collision had come and that they were both right. It was a silly

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collision, because she had not done the thing which was causing it. But it did not matter. Sooner or later the clash between the two natures was bound to happen. In a way the whole thing was a pity. Perhaps, if Molly had never met the Duke she would have schooled herself in time to obey the rules, like all the other players; the young always kick and, after all, a Duke is more or less above the law. At any rate, to a certain extent he can make his own conventions. Yes, it looked as if it was a pity that Henry had left his hat just where he did on that Friday afternoon.

"Is that all you've got to say?" her father was asking.

"Yes, father," said Molly, "that's all."

For a moment or two Samuel Shine was non-plused. He had not expected this. Denial, perhaps; tears, perhaps; but not this. It was quite ridiculous. He did not know what to say.

And then a peculiar thing happened. Sidney Goyle, who had not turned round, even when Mr. Shine came in, now faced the father with his weak mouth shut in a thin line and a new light in his gray eyes.

"Whatever she's done," he said simply, "I am willing to make her my wife." He must have thought of the cost while he stood looking out of the window, for this sort of thing never remained a secret long in Bermondsey circles. Anyway, there he was with his offer, a little white, a little over-emphasized, a little awkward, but a man with his big moment. Sidney Goyle would never rise as

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high as that again. Mrs. Shine gulped incredulously.

But Molly laughed, though she could have bitten her tongue out when she saw the face of the poor knight-errant. The bathos of the thing! She had done nothing, yet in one moment to become Mrs. Goyle had become an honor she could hardly hope to expect! And so she laughed—she really could not help it. The stark tragedy in that room so nearly overlapped into farce.

Sidney Goyle looked at her for a moment, then picked up his hat; he bowed to Molly a little awkwardly and looked at Mrs. Shine.

"It is no longer," he said, "any business of mine," and in dead silence he left the house.

In very trying circumstances Mr. Goyle had given an excellent imitation of a gentleman.

Mrs. Shine turned to her husband.

"She's not only bad," she said, "she don't want to be an honest woman."

"Shut up, Em!" said her husband brusquely. "Leave it to me." He bent over the table. "Tell me the truth," he said to Molly hoarsely.

"I have told you the truth," she answered.

"You lie!" he said. "What's the man's name?"

But Molly was silent. What difference would it make? What difference could anything make?

"Tell me his name," said her father, his voice growing more harsh.

She just shook her head.

"Obstinate, eh?" His voice shook a little with suppressed passion. "There's never been a thing

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like this in my family, nor in my father's before me. If a man 'ad told me one of my own daughters 'ud go wrong I'd 'ave knocked him down, I would. An' you can laugh at it! You must be bad to the bottom, that's what you must be!"

He suddenly took her arm and twisted her round so that his face was close to hers.

"Tell me his name!" he said in a sudden access of fury. "Tell me his name!"

She shook her head and he let her go. His fingers closed and unclosed spasmodically.

"What's done's done," he said, "but you shall know what your father thinks of you. You're a bad woman and a liar, and what's left o' sinfulness don't amount to much. The first's too bad to cure, but I 'ad a way of teachin' you to tell the truth, and, by God! I'll do it now, if you were twice your age."

He took her by the shoulders and showed her the door.

"Go into the kitchen," he said savagely.

For one second she looked at him over her shoulder. Then she turned and went slowly into the kitchen; it was no good. She couldn't explain.

Mr. Shine turned round to his wife. "Wait for me," he said, and turned to the door. Gladys made a sudden movement.

"Father," she cried, "what are you going to do?"

He pushed her aside.

"What has this to do with you?" he said.

He stopped for a moment in the hall. Then

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they heard his heavy footsteps going into the kitchen. Gladys didn't care to look at her mother; she went across and sat on the sofa, her knuckles showing white on her clenched hands.

And all at once she heard what she dreaded to hear—the dull, vicious thud of a stick on human flesh.

Gladys stared with wide eyes out of the window. It was too dreadful; surely her father was wrong. The thing was too big to be dealt with like this. It seemed bathos that Molly should be beaten for ruining her body and soul. Gladys gave a quick look at her mother. Mrs. Shine was sitting at the table, her hands clasped together. The younger daughter almost thought she could see a look of satisfaction in her eyes. If so, it was the fierce satisfaction that the Inquisitors felt at the purging of a soul.

The dreadful sounds from the kitchen seemed endless. Just the dull thuds of the stick—nothing else. Molly had always been like that, Gladys thought to herself.

Would he never stop?

Suddenly there came a long wail of pain and almost immediately the blows ceased.

Gladys shifted uneasily on the sofa. Her mother had not moved. They could hear Mr. Shine coming back.

He came into the room slowly, and jerked his head toward the girl on the sofa.

"Get out, Gladys!" he said. She went out with a last glance at the still motionless figure of

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her mother. Samuel Shine went up to the mantelpiece and brought his hand down upon it heavily.

"My God, Em!" he said. "My God!"

He was quite sober now.

The mother said nothing. He gave a dry sob.

"I'd never 'ave believed it of Moll," he said, "never. She were always my favorite."

Perhaps if Molly had seen him then she would have attempted the impossible, told him everything, and trusted in a good Providence that he should believe her. But Molly was sitting, dry-eyed, on her bed near the little window, wondering with that quaint mind of hers whether she was supposed to be any better for the bruises on her back.

Mrs. Shine answered nothing to her husband's words, but she rose and walked over to the window. Suddenly she turned.

"She's dead to me," she said. "The wages of sin is death, and dead she is."

The man shrugged his shoulders. If ever he had needed his wife it was at this moment, but that she should fail him was only to be expected. He sat down rather heavily in the windsor chair that was especially his seat; in this chair he had held Molly on his knee. He remembered, in happier days, he had made her a doll's house—a splendid doll's house it was. He used to play with it, for her amusement in this chair. He sat there now, far into the night. He did not even notice when his wife went out of the room.

When Gladys went upstairs Molly was in bed;

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propped up on one arm she was looking out of the little window over rows of chimney-pots and telegraph wires and smoke, all toned into one weird picture by the darkness of the night above and the lights in the streets below.

The younger sister began slowly to undress. There was a gulf fixed between the two now, she thought. This thing that had happened had made them strangers. Curiously enough, she felt shy of speaking to Molly. But as she was getting into bed she wondered that her sister should not move, but looked steadily out over the roof-tops.

"What are you looking at, Molly?" she said.

"Piccadilly," said Molly.

Gladys stared at her. She never had understood her sister. She got slowly into bed, and was about to blow out the candle.

"Is that where he lives?" she asked suddenly, with a quaint note of awe.

Molly turned and looked at her; she saw the worldly little face, the over-wise eyes, the thin lips. She sighed.

"Yes," she said; "that's where he lives."

The candle went out.

CHAPTER V

THE DUKE'S CREED

LADY OCTAVIA sailed into the study at Wynninghame House with a light in her eyes that heralded the imminent organization of someone. Behind her came her daughter, Mary Blake, a slim girl of nineteen, with a wealth of very fair hair and a fresh, sweet face, which her ultra-fashionable clothes were unable to spoil. It is fortunate that mothers cannot have the molding of their daughters' faces as well as their figures.

Henry had a large chart of the Pacific Ocean spread out on the table, and was poring over it while Peter Graine stood on the hearthrug looking extremely superior. Lady Octavia began to take off her gloves at once.

"Old Edgeware's nephew proposed to Mary yesterday afternoon," she said. "Of course I refused him."

"Why?" the Duke asked without looking up.

"Why?" echoed his sister. "My dear Henry, he is twenty-seven and already has gout; and his mother says he snores, but then she hates the idea of his marrying anybody."

Peter Graine laughed as Mary went over to him.

"Mother loves to arrange everything," she said; "but of course I shall marry whom I please in the end."

"Of course," said the Duke gravely.

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Lady Octavia sighed.

"I believe girls do now," she said. "You have not asked me to sit down, Henry."

"Do I have to ask?"

"No," she said, seating herself by the table; "but it would sound rather well. Henry," she added, "I read the report of the Conference in the *Times*. How could you? Why did you let him, Peter?"

"Well," said the Professor, "for one thing I didn't know he was going to; and in the second place——"

The Duke cut in.

"It would not have made any difference," he said. "I believe in every man's right to tilt at his own windmills."

"But the wings always hit his relations," said Octavia. She sighed. "Never mind," she added; "we are used to it. I met Mr. Pardoe-Vine in Bond Street. He said at once, 'I see Wynninghame has made a fool of himself again.'" She looked at her wrist, then leaned over and touched a bell on the desk. "It is half-past four," she said. "I accept your offer of tea, Henry, in the spirit in which it should have been made."

"I'm sorry, Octavia," said the Duke; then, as a servant appeared: "Tea, please."

"And toast," added Octavia. "Tea time," she went on, as the man left the room, "is the only possible time for toast. At breakfast it is too brisk a food. I hate anything that crackles for breakfast. It should be a soft and gloomy meal."

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Peter Graine laughed.

"Since you have come in, Octavia," he said, "no one else has spoken save in monosyllables. I say it in admiration. You are a mistress of trivialities."

"If you or Henry have anything to say," answered Lady Octavia imperturbably, "say it."

"Personally," said the Duke with a shade of irony in his voice, "I have nothing to say at all."

"Well, Henry," Octavia went on, "I admit that you are a clever man and that I am not a clever woman. On the other hand, as a business proposition I should be the one that would appeal to the investor. You think a great deal, Henry, and it is possible that one day you will give birth to an idea of importance, though personally I am inclined to think your life will be one long miscarriage. I suppose I am being coarse. You had better not listen, Mary."

"I never do, mother," said the girl simply.

Peter Graine gave a roar of laughter.

"I beg your pardon, Octavia," he said, "but that was really funny."

"I suppose it was," admitted Octavia; "one brings up one's children and then they proceed to take one down."

"I never meant——" began Mary, but Octavia cut in.

"Then you should have," she said; "never admit that you have been witty unawares. Here is the tea! Henry, you look tired of me. Are you?"

"My dear Octavia, is that a polite question to ask?"

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"Then you are—well, it won't make any difference." She poured out some tea and selected a piece of toast. "As a matter of fact," she went on, "I have not come here simply to drink your tea, which is horrid, or to indulge in the trivialities which tire you, Henry."

The Duke smiled.

"You have an object?" he said.

"I always have an object," answered his sister.

"Do you ever intend to marry, Henry?"

He leaned back in his chair.

"No," he said at length.

"I do not believe you ever have any temptations, do you?"

"Oh, yes. There are lots of people I should like to murder."

"Is it necessary to be personal?"

"You are quite safe, Octavia."

She laughed.

"Why don't you wish to marry, Henry?" she asked. "Have you never been in love?"

"All my life," he said, "with the world and everything that is in it."

She snapped her fingers.

"You cannot marry a syndicate like that," she said. "It is one of my ambitions to be an aunt."

"Henry is a fish, Octavia," said the Professor sadly.

"We have had this out so many times," said the Duke; "you think it is my duty to marry. I believe you think it is waste of a Duchess. Well, Octavia, women do not attract me in that way."

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The—er—follies of a young man”—he looked at Mary out of the corner of his eye, but she was placidly sipping her tea—"the follies of a young man," he went on, "I have never experienced. I have never wished to experience them. What is marriage but an old man's folly?"

"You don't mean that, Uncle Henry," said Mary.

"Perhaps not, my dear," he said. "But for me to marry would be a crime. People tell me that the capacity for loving a woman is the most beautiful thing in the world. Well, I have missed it."

Octavia sighed.

"You are a great disappointment, Henry," she said.

"I should be a greater disappointment to my wife."

"Isn't every husband?" cried Octavia.

"I love to hear people talking about marriage," said Mary from her corner. "Nobody has a good word to say for it; but the world goes on all the same."

"At your age," said her mother, "one always marries an angel."

"Later," added the Professor, "one discovers that it is the one with the flaming sword."

"How do you know?" said Mary. "You have never been married."

"I never deserved it," said Peter ambiguously.

"At least," said the Duke slowly, demolishing in a sentence the Professor's hastily thrown-up defenses, "at least no woman has ever suffered on my account."

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"How do you know?" cried Mary again. Even at nineteen one has had one's affairs.

"Women only suffer about the things that interest them," he said. "I am uninteresting."

Octavia helped herself to some more tea.

"Very few nice men," she said, "realize how many girls have lain awake all night on their account. All nice women realize that men are having insomnia over them. It is one of the differences between the sexes. Peter imagines every woman whose supper he pays for is in love with him. But then, of course, he is not a nice man."

"You say that, Octavia," said the Professor, "because I have never made love to you."

"It appears," rejoined Octavia, smiling at him blandly, "that he is vulgar as well."

"I am annihilated," said Peter, "but I have had a very happy life."

"In that case," said Lady Octavia, "you need no excuses."

"Think so?" broke in the Duke. "That is not my opinion."

The Professor snorted.

"Henry has one vice at least," he said. "He talks like a clergyman."

"As a class, Peter," the Duke said, "I should say that clergymen speak more sense in a year than any other profession. They are severely handicapped by being so plainly labeled. If scientists had to wear their collars the wrong way round, science would be even more neglected than it is."

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"Anyway," said the Professor, "I refuse to justify my peccadilloes."

"We haven't the time," said Henry dryly.

"Oh, come," cried Octavia; "don't snap at one another. The truth of the matter is, Henry does not know the difference between right and wrong. He imagines because his own pet sins are peculiar that they are not sins. He pauperizes the people on his estates, and makes all the neighboring villages jealous. That is causing strife, and is therefore a sin. His indiscriminate charity is exactly the same as Peter's indiscriminate love-making—lack of self-control. Love should be organized, like everything else. If it oughtn't to be, what is marriage for? Personally, I want you to marry, Henry. I think it might save you. And what does it matter to me whether Gerald succeeds to the title or not? Only I want to know whether there is any likelihood of your marrying. You are thirty-eight, and should be able to tell. If Gerald is going to be Duke of Wymningham he will have to be carefully watched. Do you think the Marquis of Cartley would have been allowed to marry his wife if they had known he was going to succeed to the title? Certainly not. Even now, after seven years' training, her skirts hang down farther at the back than in front."

"You may take it as official," said the Duke smiling, "that Gerald will one day possess Wymningham House."

Octavia rose.

"Well," she said, "you are peculiar, Henry. Somehow, after a man has returned from Paris, one

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feels one must inquire after the state of his heart; I have done my duty."

She went over to the door, where Peter joined her. Mary came across to the Duke.

"Uncle Henry," she said, "what is your creed?"

"My creed?" he repeated.

"I don't want you to recite the Prayer Book, but you are one of the few men I know who have a creed, and I should like to hear it."

The Duke's lips curved into a whimsical smile.

"If I have a creed," he said, "it is to do what one thinks right at the moment and correct one's mistakes as they occur."

"Is that all?"

"There is a second half," he said, "It is: 'Ignore the opinions of your relations.'"

"That sounds very dangerous," said Octavia from the door.

Mary slipped her hands into her uncle's.

"I think it is a beautiful creed," she said.

"My dear," he said, "it is the creed of a prig."

She lowered her voice.

"If ever I marry," she said, "I hope it will be a prig—with gray eyes and curly hair," she added as she walked across to the door.

"Henry," cried Octavia, "is this right, what Peter is telling me about your going to the South Seas?"

For answer the Duke pointed to the map.

"Well, really," said his sister; "but you were always an obstinate man. Come along, Mary! These days in town are too fatiguing, but Mary must have clothes. She has not a thing to wear."

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"I hadn't noticed it," said the Duke.

"Pooh!" said the Professor. "Did you ever know the woman who had got anything to wear?"

"You forget, Peter," he rejoined, "I have not mixed in your circles."

Octavia smiled.

"If Henry had been a woman," she said, "he would have been called a cat."

The Duke looked at Peter.

"That must be the feminine of prig," he said.

Mary laughed.

"I have plenty of clothes, Uncle Prig," she said.

"You are quite right; but mother thinks that though marriages are made in heaven they are made much more quickly in the season—which is just coming on."

"Really, that's quite smart," said Lady Octavia. "It must be, because if I'd said it at your age I should have been sent to my room."

She went out, and the Duke and Peter watched them go down the steps and into Piccadilly. As they turned back Peter stopped.

"So no woman has ever suffered on your account, eh, Henry?" he said suddenly.

"I hope I may say so," returned the Duke.

"Bah!" said the Professor, swinging open the big doors. "Go and look in the glass. You're just the sort of man women go and pine away about."

But, of course, the Duke, who forgot everything, forgot to look in the glass.

CHAPTER VI

MOLLY DISCOVERS HERSELF

SAMUEL SHINE found himself in a very serious dilemma. His wife would neither speak to Molly nor even admit that she existed, except when she would turn suddenly round on her husband and tell him it was his sacred duty to turn his daughter into the streets. To the cabinet-maker, however, who, amazing as it may appear, had not been drunk once since the discovery of the letter, this course seemed tantamount to driving Molly even more firmly on to the rocks than she was already. Besides, he could not bring himself to throw a child of his out of the house, whatever she had done. Samuel Shine was one of those queer mixtures of brutality and sentiment so often found in his class of life.

To all of this his wife would merely raise her eyebrows and remark that it wasn't 'ardly fair to Gladys. And so, hour by hour, the unfortunate affair was only serving to make wider and wider the breach between the two. Every night would be made hideous in the man's ears by the reiteration of those parts of the Bible dealing with adultery, or any phrases which could possibly be twisted into showing the likelihood of eternal damnation for wrong-doers. Mrs. Shine actually and vividly believed that her daughter's body would survive its

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earthly death in order that it might be served up in flames before God, like a sort of rum omelette. Her husband, whose intellect was not overdeveloped, did not worry about her future existence, a subject on which he was always sufficiently hazy, but endeavored, struggling beneath an avalanche of texts, to concentrate his mind upon the immediate position.

Worst of all, the affair had become known to the neighbors. Mrs. Shine, with yet another cross piled on her already overburdened shoulders, could not refrain from drawing attention to her load, and now almost the whole of Ball Street knew, discussed, and, as is the curious habit of people, rejoiced over the tragedy at Number Three. Gladys, who, for all her worldly wisdom, was but a child, regarded the whole affair as an extra excitement in a rather dull world, and held her head even higher than usual on her way to the dingy little room in the City, where she was wrestling with the mysteries of "short'and" and "commerce." She seemed to herself a more important personage than ever. Whereby you see Gladys had the soul of a press-photographer.

Meanwhile, Molly had her meals in the kitchen. Except for the fact that she felt very sorry for her father, her fresh young mind, as soon as the bruises on her back ceased to worry her, had dived deep into the tragedy and found the face of Comedy grinning at her from the bottom. When the Truth, if told, would only sound like a very inadequate lie, what is one to do? "Tell the Truth," cries the

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Christian philosopher, "and shame the Devil!" But Molly, like everyone else in this wicked world, had a preference for being considered a knave rather than a fool, and if she were to go to her father and tell him the Duke of Wymninghame was sending her two pounds a week from his mansion in order that she might buy books like "The Path of Patricia," and that he wasn't a man at all but a dream-monger, she could see that he would be perfectly justified in giving her another beating. What is more, she knew he would do so, and that settled it. So Molly did the next best thing, and prayed to God to solve the problem. Her faith being simple and sure, she had no doubt that He would do it, and in the meantime she didn't see why He should expect her to be miserable about an affair which she had placed unreservedly in such safe hands.

There came an afternoon when a knock at the door (the bell had been out of order for two years) was followed by the entrance of a young clergyman of so athletic and vigorous a build that the little skylight seemed suddenly abashed, and the mere entrance of this giant plunged the passage into Stygian darkness. Molly recognized his voice as that of the curate of the church which she had attended ever since she was five, and for which her mother's unfortunate temperament had given her an equally unfortunate contempt. But the curate, the Rev. Christopher Warden, she liked in so far as she knew him, which was very little. What probably appealed to Molly was that he was a fervent

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idealist, to whom the ugliness of the world was a real pain and its beauty a genuine delight. His belief in Divinity sprang from his belief in Humanity; not vice versa, which is such a common mistake. He felt certain the man who can imagine "Excelsior" can ultimately reach Excelsior, and this belief led him logically to the conviction that wherever and whenever that end was reached there would be found God; at the same time he prided himself on being a practical man of the world.

Molly heard his deep voice outside the sitting-room, saying, "Can I come in?" and after that she heard no more. But an intuition told her that she was the reason of his visit, and that it was the saving of her soul that was now under discussion. She was right. After about a quarter of an hour she was sent for, and went into the little sitting-room, which had been more or less forbidden ground since that momentous Saturday afternoon.

The young clergyman rose as she came in.

"I feel sure," he said in his deep bass, "that there must be some explanation of this."

"Who told you?" asked Molly.

"My dear child," he said, "I cannot help hearing what people say, can I? But I need not believe it."

He held out his hand and she took it.

"That is very good of you," she said.

Her mother shrugged her shoulders. She saw no use in these honeyed words.

"Won't you tell us the truth?" said the curate gently.

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Molly looked at him and at her father. It was now or never. Well, she thought to herself, she would tell them. It would be a big test, anyway. She suddenly sat down on the edge of the table.

"Ever hear of the Duke of Wynninghame?" she asked.

The clergyman stared at her.

"Of course," he said.

"Well," she went on, "he's the man that's been sending me the money."

She became aware that they were all looking at her incredulously; she began to take a delight in adding improbability to improbability.

"I met him at the Zoo," she said, "for about twenty minutes, and had tea with him. He gave me a splendid tea, and sent me two pounds a week afterward to buy books with." She stopped with a little gasp and closed her mouth firmly. That was all she was going to tell them; they should never know of the nights she had spent trying to re-create the picture of her dream-monger as he disappeared around the corner into the Snake House, his hat in his hand and his hair blowing in the wind.

She became aware of her mother's monotonous whine. "A lie," she was saying, "is an abomination in the sight of the Lord!"

The slow voice of the clergyman broke in on her.

"You cannot expect us to believe that," he said.

"I don't," answered Molly.

"Then what was the use?" asked her father, a little wearily.

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"You asked me to tell the truth," she said. "I can't help it if you don't believe it."

Her mother regarded her husband sternly.

"I told you it weren't no good letting her spend her time reading fairy tales an' trash," she said; "now you see . . . she'd be a liar even if she weren't worse."

After which statement, which appeared in some mysterious way to comfort her exceedingly, Mrs. Shine sat back in her chair and linked her hands, as much as to say, "That finishes it as far as I am concerned." Perhaps she felt that as Molly would have been a constitutional liar anyway, this other catastrophe was not of such great importance. With souls, as in other matters, she believed in cutting her losses.

The clergyman rose, not without dignity, and turning his back upon the occupants of the room, stared sorrowfully out of the window. He was not a man of great imagination, and Molly's story was too much for him. He believed it to be a clergyman's duty to be a man of the world, and perhaps this belief led him into a certain conventionality of outlook that left him wholly unprepared for the extraordinary or even the whimsical. It is the danger of living in the world that as we grow older we find more difficulty in getting out of it, even for a moment. That is why children are sometimes inexplicable; up to the age of seven we are permitted to shake hands with the angels. Afterward, only at a price—unless, of course, one is a member of the Peerage.

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As the curate looked out of the window he was wondering what he should say to Molly. He decided that her whole story was a fabrication in the hope that, by some extraordinary chance, they might be foolish enough to believe her. Yet it was in the nature of the man to be kind, and when he turned round his eyes held very little of condemnation in them, but perhaps rather too much pity.

"Do not think," he said to Molly, "that I do not appreciate your loyalty to this man—whoever he is. I do. But it is a mistaken loyalty. In these circumstances I am old-fashioned enough to believe it is the man who must take the blame and," he brought his fist down on the table, "such share of the consequences as he can be made to bear. You have done wrong. The least you can do is to take other people's advice as to how to pick up the pieces."

He paused.

"Such pieces as can be picked up," he added, a little bitterly.

Molly, who had risen when the clergyman began to speak, plumped suddenly down into the black, shiny chair by the fire. So they didn't believe a single word of it! The thought made her feel suddenly rebellious. It had cost her a little to tell them what she had told them, and they thought apparently that she had simply composed the story as she went along. Well, she would tell them no more.

"I can't see any pieces to pick up," she said.

The clergyman regarded her sternly.

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"Do you still persist that the man is the Duke of Wynninghame?" he asked.

She nodded.

The Rev. Christopher Warden was silent. He stole a look at her, and saw that she was beautiful. After all, it was possible that the Duke had seen her and desired her; and the fact that so great a man had stooped so far—the curate's lips curled in irony at his own thoughts—might explain the fall of a good girl like Molly. After all, the Peerage was human. He remembered the old Earl of Coleborough, a sporting gentleman of eighty-seven, who had come down in a gray top-hat to open the new Sunday school buildings, and who, when pressed for a speech, had blown his nose violently and said, "Deuced fine lot of women about here." Yes, even the Peerage was human, and a pretty girl is a pretty girl and has no class. The curate decided to drop a bomb shell.

"Very well," he said suddenly. "You and I will call upon the Duke of Wynninghame!"

Molly jumped up.

"No!" she cried. "Crikes—no!" Her vehemence surprised even herself. It seemed almost sacrilege to transpose this sordid business into the magician's palace. Her mother, putting the obvious construction on the refusal, smiled sardonically at her husband, who, truth to tell, was weary of the whole affair.

"What would be the use, anyway," he said.

"Use!" shouted the clergyman. "Why should the man who has done this thing go on his way un-

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challenged? It is wrong that he should not be faced with his own sin—definitely wrong.”

“ ‘E ain’t the man,” put in Mrs. Shine, a world of scorn in her tone. “A duke? If ’e were, don’t you think we’d ’ave ’eard of it long since?”

And, indeed, Mrs. Shine herself thought vaguely that, in all probability, hell fire was kept at a lower temperature for anyone above the rank of an Honorable.

Molly, staring into the glass on the mantelpiece, could see all three of them looking at her. What a puzzle it all was! She had told them the truth, and they had not even tried to believe her. Molly herself admitted that the affair was fantastic, but it had happened, and, after all, we take for granted a thousand miracles in our daily life. At that moment the problem appeared to her insoluble.

Then slowly her mind reverted to the magician who had spun this web. If a dream-monger supplied dreams that went bad, she thought, quaintly, the proper course must be to take them back. Dared she? Dared she go to that big house and ask him what to do when you hang on to a dream and it skids? She felt she was losing faith in fairy tales, and, if she once lost faith, she knew that the whole dreadful affair, with all its drabness, would overwhelm her and bring her tumbling down far, far lower than the angels. Her father’s weariness, her mother’s bitterness, the clergyman’s stern kindness, were all insidiously folding themselves round her like the tentacles of an octopus, and dragging her remorselessly away, till the moment would come

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when she would give a last desperate clutch at her star, miss it, and go plunging down, down . . . to a world she had never been able to understand, which would inevitably crush her—the world of every day.

And as she stood there with all these thoughts tumbling through her mind like clowns at a circus, those three apostles of the ordinary, blessed in their creed, stood watching her. Rebels must be brought into line; Benvenuto Cellini would rightly have been given six months in Bermondsey to-day; and the position of the three judges is unassailable.

Still, there are yet places in the world for Dresden Shepherdesses, and it is wiser to try to find their niche than to try to fit them with overalls.

But whoever pulls the strings that guide us through the comedies and tragedies of our world got suddenly to work, and Molly, just as the situation was about to sweep her out of her depth and drown her, was given a clear vision of the dream-monger's dark gray eyes and his silver-brown hair, and with a little leap of her heart (whether of joy or surprise, who can tell?) realized that she loved him, not for his dreams, but for himself.

And with this realization came the feeling that she must see him again, even if it meant bearding him in his palace, attended by a clergyman and her very mundane father.

So she turned quite calmly to her inquisitors and said:

"All right! I'll go to him any time you like."

But with her head full of this great new thought,

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her whole being deluged with bitter sweet emotions, and everything else in the world crowded out to make room for the only thing that mattered, she could not wait to hear what any of them had to say, and rushed precipitately out of the door up to her bedroom.

There she sat on her bed and stared before her. Then she began to rock slowly to and fro, moaning in a sort of monotone, "I love him—oh, I love him!" till at last the tears rushed to her eyes, and she flung herself down by the bedside.

God must hear some curious prayers sent flying helter-skelter up to His seat from a puzzled world, and perhaps in heaven it was not considered comic when Molly whispered brokenly into her torn counterpane:

"Oh, God . . . oh, God, let me wake up and find he is a clerk!"

CHAPTER VII

THE CHURCH MILITANT

THE Duke of Wynninghame was feeding his lizard. It was a new lizard, and the Duke had some quite impossible theory regarding the formation of its head. He had not been in the least in the mood to see his solicitor, who always annoyed him by his severe business attitude and the irritating way in which he gloried in his own efficiency. However, the interview, dealing with the necessary financial arrangements for the proposed expedition to what was now generally designated in the family as Toad Island, was over, and the solicitor had gone on his way with a curt remark to the effect that he had a divorce at eleven.

The Duke looked up from the little zinc cage which he was vaguely stuffing with ants' eggs and regarded Peter Graine, who was in his usual position of authority on the hearth-rug, with a slight frown.

"I cannot really like a man who says he has a divorce at eleven, Peter," he said. "It seems so crude."

Then his habitual good nature asserted itself.

"But I hope it is a lucrative divorce," he added, peering in at the lizard, which, like the rest of his acquaintances, took no notice of him whatever.

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"There is no doubt," he said, "that the cerebellum is overdeveloped."

The Professor laughed.

"If you pile any more of that stuff in, the stomach will be overdeveloped, too," he said.

Peter Graine was staying at Wynninghame House, directing the arrangements for the expedition, a task for which the Duke was wholly incompetent. The Professor had become quite enthusiastic about the voyage, not, it must be confessed, because he had any faith in its object being attained, but because, as usual after his holiday in Paris, he badly needed a change, and a trip to the Pacific in the Duke's comfortable yacht would be a very pleasant way of getting one.

Now he endeavored, as he had already several times endeavored, out of a sense of duty, to bring Henry sufficiently to earth to understand in what sort of directions his money was being spent.

"There are," he said, "several sun-helmets coming up to-day, Henry, for your approval."

The Duke made a gesture of irritation.

"No, no, Peter," he said; "I don't in the least wish to approve helmets. That is your affair. Besides, I shall wear a cap."

"You cannot wear a cap in the sun."

"Well, then, I shall wear a cabbage-leaf. A helmet makes one look like an American staring at the Sphinx; I would far rather be mistaken for a tropical plant than for an American."

Peter smiled.

"You needn't be afraid," he answered; "you are

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far too inefficient ever to be mistaken for anything else than an English Peer."

"Well," said the Duke, "one should be satisfied with that station of life to which it has pleased God to call one."

"One invariably is," said the Professor dryly, "if it includes fifteen thousand a year and seven estates."

"There seems, then, a fallacy in the story of the camel and the needle's eye," said the Duke, putting the lizard, who was now absolutely panting with indigestion, on to the table.

Peter Graine shrugged his shoulders.

"There are fallacies in everything that is written," he said; "a thing is not necessarily great because it is inspired. For instance, the slopes of Parnassus are crowded ten deep with people on whom Love has dropped his first visiting card; but the verses they write to the little god in return——" He broke off. "One wonders Cupid doesn't get fed up with and emigrate to Saturn."

"I think," said the Duke, "that if the emotion is great, the work will be great; at any rate, in the eyes of the author of the emotion."

The Professor gave his usual little snort of disgust.

"Of course, Henry," he said, "that is your creed. Do what you think best at the moment, and if the world puts you down a fool or a knave, what does it matter? There is probably some supreme being who shares with you the knowledge that you are right. It's a very easy creed and a very cowardly

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one. A very usual form of funk is that which makes a man an eccentric."

The Duke nodded good-naturedly.

"You should have been a barrister, Peter," he said, "always, of course, on behalf of the Crown; in a year we should have a museum for innocent men."

"Sarcasm, Henry, is not your strong point."

"On the contrary, I excel at it; only, fortunately, everybody thinks it is politeness."

The Professor gathered up from the table several imposing lists of necessities for the voyage.

"Very well, Henry," he said, "have it your own way. Only, if ever you are faced with a real problem, my advice to you is to do the exact opposite to that which you think right; otherwise, take my word for it, you will be wrong."

The Duke walked over to the window and smiled.

"Thank you, Peter, for your advice," he said; "I shall do my best to forget it immediately."

The Professor stopped with his hand on the door.

"Like all idiots, you are as obstinate as a mule," he said. "Will you or will you not try on those sun-helmets?"

"I will not," said the Duke pleasantly.

"Then I must guess the size of your head," answered Peter. "If it isn't seven and three-eighths, you will endure agonies on the Equator."

He vanished with the last word, and the Duke, who hardly ever spoke to his friend at all without

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some such passage of arms, retired into his chair with the comfortable feeling that nothing could shake a friendship that continued so steadfast under such conditions. And as it was a friendship, curious as it may seem, which both valued exceedingly, this was very satisfactory.

His long intimacy with the cynical Peter, far from robbing the Duke of any of his obstinate optimism and good-will toward men, had had the opposite effect. Like all obstinate men, the more opposition that he had received the more tenacious of his own theories of life he became. And Henry had had plenty of opposition from the days of his boyhood, when Octavia, in short frocks but silk stockings, had endeavored to graft the philosophy of Mayfair—a very fair smattering of which she had mastered at the age of fourteen—on to one who insisted on walking down Piccadilly with his feet on the pavement and his head in heaven. This attitude toward life is very charming and attractive, but in effect it simply amounts to not looking where one is going. And, as everyone knows, in a crowd there is nothing more annoying than that.

Henry himself recognized that it was an extremely lucky thing that he had not had to face and solve any of the more acute problems of living. An army of servants, headed by the absolutely invaluable Dunn, who remembered everything, had saved the Duke the trouble of withdrawing his head from the clouds even for a moment.

His ship sailed calmly on, manned by an excellent crew, and so far she had never entered waters

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where the shallows and the reefs were known only to the captain, and where he would be forced to take the wheel himself.

Fate, however, is a theatrical sort of goddess, and she chose just this moment for Dunn to come in, bearing on a tray the card of the Rev. Christopher Warden.

The Duke turned the card over in his fingers.

"Is this someone I have forgotten, Dunn?" he asked.

"No, your Grace," answered the valet, "I have never seen the gentleman before."

"Ought I to see him?"

Dunn considered for a moment.

"I do not know, your Grace," he said at last. "One judges men by their trousers, but with the clergy it is no sort of guide." He paused. "Perhaps," he went on in a moment, "it would be wiser to see him, your Grace."

"Really," said the Duke who had done nothing at all since breakfast except feed the lizard, "really, this is a very busy morning."

As Dunn retired he sat down and endeavored to remember the name of Warden, a perfectly hopeless proceeding, as, even had he met the man the day before, by now he would have completely forgotten his existence.

The clergyman came into the room, a very monument of Christianity determined to be muscular. As the Duke rose and thrust out his hand, the curate put his firmly into the pockets of his trousers and shook his head slightly.

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"I have not come here," he said, "to shake hands with you."

"Of course not," said the Duke readily. "Think of the time wasted in the world shaking hands." He waved toward a chair.

"No," said the clergyman. "What I have to say will be better said standing."

The Duke sat down.

"We all have our eccentricities," he said. "You will forgive me if I prefer to sit." He took a long look at the athletic young man. "Correct me if I am wrong," he went on, "but you appear to me to be angry about something."

"I have certainly done an unusual thing in coming here to see you," said the curate slowly. "Perhaps I have done a foolish thing; my excuse is that I am an idealist."

"So am I," murmured the Duke.

The eyes of the clergyman blazed.

"Is the seduction of innocent women one of your ideals?" he snapped.

For a moment or two the Duke regarded him in a puzzled silence.

It was evident that the young man was very much in earnest. Henry pushed a box of cigarettes toward the clergyman.

"Sit down," he said, "it appears that you and I are of some interest to each other."

It seemed to the curate the moment for falling back upon his man-of-the-world methods. He took the chair indicated and lighted a cigarette.

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"Doubtless," he began, "you consider me an impetuous young fool."

The Duke answered nothing; he was blowing smoke rings with an absent-minded precision that was amazing.

"Also," his companion went on, "I dare say all clergymen annoy you; I know there are people like that. But we are not, believe me, the wholesale purveyors of blame and censure that the lazier kind of layman likes to suppose. We recognize that the world is imperfect; indeed, it is the struggle against its imperfections that make a great deal of what is beautiful in it."

The Duke nodded. Christopher Warden had a musical voice to which it was quite charming to listen.

"The seduction of women," went on the young man, "is unfortunately a common enough evil. In all cases it is very wrong, very sad; but there are times"—the young man rose, his enormous presence dominating the room—"there are times, your Grace, when it is damnable, utterly damnable!"

The Duke rose, too, and confronted the clergyman.

"I go farther," he said; "I say it is always damnable!"

"You? You have committed the sin in its most cowardly, its most shameless form. You have taken advantage of the glitter of your wealth and your title to tempt an innocent and clean girl."

The Duke's eyes strayed toward the window.

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"Very wrong of me," he murmured. "How thankful Peter would be to hear it!"

"You prefer to forget it?"

"I always forget everything, Mr. Warden. If there are any women I have seduced my servant will be sure to have made a note of it."

The clergyman looked grave.

"One cannot joke," he said, "about a soul that is hurt. It is blasphemy."

"My dear sir," answered the Duke, "there is not one woman whose virtue has ever suffered on my account."

His companion shook his head.

"One expects denials," he said. "But I am not a fool; a girl in Bermondsey only gets two pounds a week from a peer of the realm for one reason."

The Duke looked puzzled, and Warden felt that the moment to which he had been working was come.

"It's not true, then?" he cried. "As I suspected, she told a lie. You have never heard of Molly Shine, or of Number Three Ball Street?"

"Of course," said the Duke; "the girl at the Zoo!"

His mind traveled back slowly to Molly, and he conjured up a dim picture in his brain of that tea they had had together in Regent's Park. So she had taken advantage of him, after all! He had heard, of course, that women did this sort of thing, but it was a side of life with which he was coming into touch for the first time. He smiled a

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little as he thought of Lady Octavia's many warnings about indiscriminate charity.

Then the smile disappeared. He remembered the sympathy he had felt for the girl, whose circumstances were robbing her of what should be free to everyone—her dreams. And all the time she had never seen the Golden Gate at all. She was one of those who play in the puddles of the world and find their pleasure in making mud pies. If there was one thing the Duke hated above all others, it was to be disillusioned. So long as he was allowed to go through life believing what he wished to believe, and shutting his eyes obstinately to the facts which he liked to pretend did not exist, he was happy. It was a selfish plan of existence, and Henry would have been the first to admit it. But it was the way in which he found happiness, and he had never been able to make the necessary effort to throw it off. His whole life, his wealth, his rank, had conspired toward making it possible for him to create his own paradise and lock the gates firmly against intruders. And now he had put his own head outside, and was faced with one of the very muddiest of the puddles of which he had so persistently ignored the existence.

His voice was a little hard as he turned to the clergyman again.

"And the girl," he asked, "what does she say?"

The young man had entirely misunderstood the Duke's silence; he saw in it the breathing space required by a scoundrel who is found out and is

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rapidly turning over in his mind the ways and the price of escape.

"The girl?" he echoed. "She denies it, of course. Have you ever known the woman who would not defend, with her last breath, the man who has wronged her?"

The Duke's face became suddenly wreathed in smiles.

"Do they?" he asked. "Now the female lizard is very different; most ferocious when annoyed by the male."

He found himself surprised at the delight he felt in the knowledge that he had not been deceived in Molly, after all. He would not have known her by sight if he had met her in the street, but what mattered was that he had been right. The triumph of Lady Octavia was not yet.

He seated himself again and selected another cigarette.

"Go on," he said happily to the clergyman. "Go on."

CHAPTER VIII

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THE Rev. Christopher Warden regarded the Duke for a few moments without saying anything. Vaguely and with a growing feeling of irritation, he was beginning to suspect that he was out of his depth. For one thing, whenever this man with the pleasant smile and gray eyes opened his mouth, he not only said something utterly unexpected, but also something which entirely scattered his interlocutor's continuity of thought and made conversation a matter of continual mental starting again. Moreover, his smile and his pose were not those of a bland villain. What they meant the curate was entirely unable to conjecture. His speculations stopped short with a sense of discomfiture and ignorance, and, as it is in the nature of man and beast to suspect that which he cannot understand, the clergyman's attitude toward Henry grew gradually the more hostile as his preconceived notions of the man were first checked, then scattered, routed, and finally lost in a fog of bewilderment. Naturally enough, being in the very center of Piccadilly, he suspected everything except simplicity.

How often in Bermondsey, with that broad-mindedness which he considered part of his stock in trade, had he quoted with a smile, "It takes all sorts to

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make a world!" But how many of those who make use of this well-worn adage ever consider that God, who made the murderer, the thief, or the roué, has balanced all things on earth and fashioned their counterparts in the other side of the scale? We are so trained nowadays to understand complexities that it is only unawares that we stumble upon simplicity. Yet all the multitudinous intricacies of modern life rest, some firmly, some insecurely, upon a simple truth. Blessed are they that never "progress" so far as to be out of sight of their starting point. After all, we envy the children because we know they are still in Eden, little Adams and little Eves who will all too soon pluck the apple and be as those who have "progressed."

But this is a digression and entirely unjustifiable.

After some few moments of puzzled silence, the clergyman moved uneasily in his chair.

"I do not really know," he said, "what motive it was that sent me here on an errand not only hopeless but, in the circumstances, absurd; I think it was the sight of that girl trying to bear up, with a smile upon her lips, against the inevitable results of her sin—your sin," he added with sudden venom. "Molly was always a good girl; it is all the harder for her to hear the sneers of her neighbors, the silence of her friends."

The Duke sighed.

"Is it possible?" he murmured.

The curate just caught the last word.

"In Bermondsey," he said, "we draw a far firmer line between good and bad than you do in Belgravia."

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"Perhaps," said Henry gravely. "And where is Miss Shine now? In Bermondsey?"

"No," replied the curate, dropping his bomb with immense satisfaction. "She is outside with her father."

The Duke rose.

"Surely, Mr. Warden," he said, "you have forgotten your manners, to leave a lady standing in the street!" He shrugged his shoulders and began to play again with the overfed and uncomfortable lizard.

The clergyman drew up the corners of his lips in a slight sneer.

"Would you rather," he asked, "that I brought her in here?"

"Of course," answered the Duke.

The young man stared at him, and suddenly, to his great annoyance and for no reason at all that he could see, felt the blood rushing to his face like a schoolboy who has been snubbed at his first dance.

"Very well," he cried in a voice rather unnecessarily loud, "I'll bring her in."

And he left the room hurriedly with a sense of defeat for which he could assign no cause.

Left to himself, the Duke walked slowly across to the window and gazed out on a typical London fog. He smiled as he recognized how exact a replica this was of his state of mind toward the problem with which he was faced. For that his first real problem had now arisen he had no doubt.

Originally, he could not help feeling, he had only done the reasonable thing. Out of the superfluity

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which had been his by inheritance, he had tried to divert a little pleasure into the life of one whose cup was not so full. And now, as the direct and immediate result, this had happened.

It annoyed Henry considerably to feel that no one in the matter could be blamed. Each was acting for the best according to his own particular lights. He bit his lip and stared into the fog.

Was this, then, the result of being a prig? He could imagine the airy way with which Peter and Octavia, and indeed the vast majority of quite decent-living folk, would dismiss the problem. But just because he had never mixed freely with the world, and never learned the accepted values of life, he could not dismiss it thus easily. He had, throughout his whole life, acted on and thought along a creed which had never been asked to stand the test of rubbing shoulders with the world. Now, for the first time, it was called upon to prove itself, and he must either shelve it or . . .

But Henry believed in the creed which he had evolved for himself among his books and his animals. It was no mere theory to him. He realized this now for the first time, seeing plainly that if he was forced to admit its inability to cope with the first problem it had come up against, he would have to begin all over again—in fact, the stimulus of his whole course of life would be torn up by the roots.

It was this fear, too, which had clutched with an icy hand at Molly's heart when she had been faced with the idea of giving up her right to dream. She, too, had felt that once the world she understood was

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taken from her, only the quicksands of unreasoning obedience to convention would be left. She had not put it to herself like that, since hers was an uneducated intelligence. Rather had she felt a vague and dreadful fear of the unknown, which had been sufficient to make her cling to her own frail structure of belief even in the very face of disaster.

The Duke, on the other hand, with his trained and scientific mind, could see plainly not only the painful effects of such a mental revolution, but also the waste of time involved in building up new foundations, were he to abandon the building already all but completed.

The way is hard for those who have grown up in a nursery of their own. And as the Duke stared into the yellow, uncompromising fog, he shook his head slightly, and in that movement signified the intention of sticking to his ship and trusting to the vessel he himself had built.

"To do what one thinks right at the moment," he had said to his niece, "and to correct one's mistakes as they occur."

He came slowly back to his chair.

"Correct one's mistakes as they occur." He realized that the difficult part of his creed was before him for the first time.

There was no doubt about the solution it offered. There was only one way of correcting the mistake that had occurred. No amount of arguing would persuade these people of the truth. No amount of conviction could undo the insults to which the girl had already been subjected.

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He must either "correct the mistake," or desert in the face of the enemy and leave his standard in rags on the field of its first battle.

"Octavia would never understand," he murmured, picking up the little cage and addressing the inside, "but *you* see there are really no two questions about it, are there?"

The sleepy lizard lifted one eye sharply and closed it again. The matter was settled.

I take this opportunity to beg you, stockbrokers, business men, ladies of fashion, philosophers, cosmopolitans, to refrain from laughing. Please remember that Henry was a peer of the realm.

When Molly came into the room, a few moments later, followed by the curate and a very sheepish-looking Samuel Shine, the Duke was leaning back in his chair, with a cigarette between his lips, and his smile of greeting told Molly at once that the picture of him that she had retained was the picture with which she had originally fallen in love. As he rose and held out his hand she gave a little involuntary shiver. As her hand touched his she experienced a thrill which had never come her way before. And it was a thrill of pure pleasure, for Molly was one of those women by whom a hopeless passion was far more to be desired than none at all, and, although the prayer she had breathed in the first moment of realization—that he might prove to be something more approachable than a Duke—had been quite sincere, she was content now with the desperately one-sided love-affair which she knew it must be.

But as she dropped his hand her momentary

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ecstasy fell away to a feeling of dull despair. What could he think of all this? Above all, what could he think of her, the centre figure in the sordid little picture?

As for Mr. Shine, he stood on the rug, just inside the door, twirling his cap in agitated fingers and wishing to heaven he had never been persuaded to come. The solemn splendors of his surroundings, the staircases, the pictures, the great pieces of furniture about Wynninghame House, all of which had had no effect upon Molly at all, had struck him dumb and reduced him to a condition of muddled abasement.

Thus he found himself shaking hands with the Duke and saying "Good morning, sir," in the same sort of voice with which he followed the prayers in church, and this was the more odd as, all the way from Bermondsey he had been rehearsing a scene in which he was the outraged father and the Duke a villain exposed, offering, if the truth must be told, large sums of money as compensation for his misdoing.

"It is very nice," the Duke was saying to Molly, "to see you again."

"Thank you, sir," she replied, almost in a whisper.

Henry guided her to a chair.

"And have you been receiving the money regularly?" he asked.

"Yes, thank you, sir."

"And the silly books—are they satisfactory?"

"Yes, thank you, sir."

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The Duke went back to his chair and his eye wandered toward the clergyman.

"But other things, I gather, are not," he said slowly.

Molly felt herself blushing horribly and hung her head.

"Tell me," he said, "just what has happened."

"I . . . I can't," she murmured.

"You told them the truth," he asked gently.

"Yes."

"And then?"

"They will never believe it; they can't, sir."

The Duke said nothing and, since the silence positively hurt her, Molly felt she must go on talking.

"I knew this would happen," she said; "I oughtn't to have taken the money."

"And why did you?" asked the Duke.

She stared for a moment at her boots.

"Because of what you said, sir," she whispered; "about clinging to one's dreams."

"Ah!" The monosyllable broke unbidden from his lips; he had, then, made a convert unawares. The responsibility was his.

"Even," Molly was going on in a low voice, "even if one loses everything else."

He leaned forward.

"And you believe that?"

"Oh, sir—I'm trying to."

It was absurd to see how seriously these two took themselves. The curate's lips curled a little cynically. There was evidently a very complete understanding between them, he thought.

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The Duke lay back in his chair.

"What happened," he asked, "when they found out and . . . er . . . interpreted the affair?"

The girl sighed.

"Father thrashed me," she said, and a smile broke out on her lips. The bathos of that thrashing seemed more evident than ever now.

"Very wrong of him," said Henry firmly, fixing his gaze upon Samuel Shine, who wished sincerely that an oubliette would deposit him at once under the ground—or at any rate in the servants' hall.

"They'll never believe us, sir," said Molly.

"No," he answered; "I think one can hardly expect them to. Only those who are fast asleep can be expected to dream efficiently. Besides," he added simply, "you are beautiful; that is a great mistake. It is always the women with the worst figures who are credited with the best intentions."

Molly felt her head whirl with all the sensations she had had when she first touched his hand. He had said she was beautiful! She heard his voice again.

"And since the catastrophe?" he was asking smoothly.

She was thankful that it was the clergyman who answered; she felt she could not trust herself.

"Since?" the young man said. "One cannot sin without paying the price, your Grace!" He heard the Duke sigh. "One cannot even commit indiscretions," he added, "without paying the price. Molly Shine is cut by her friends—she is a bad

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companion for her sister, and her mother's love for her will never be the same again."

Molly gave a short laugh, and Samuel Shine found his voice for the first time.

"Now, then, my girl," he said.

It was a kind of loyalty to Em that dragged a protest against Molly's laugh from his lips.

The Duke turned.

"Is all that true?" he asked. "Have they made you as miserable as that?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I can stick it," she said. "It isn't your fault."

The Duke rose and faced the two men.

"Good God!" he said suddenly, then wheeled away to the window. He was furiously angry with himself. He saw how the few words he had let fall had taken root in the girl's heart, and how she had tried to rear that hothouse plant in unprotected soil. And he had thought, for one moment, that she had never felt the need to enter the Golden Gate! Why, her knuckles were bleeding from knocking at the bars. He saw himself inside the gates, one to whom the keys had been given for the asking. He conjured up a picture of himself looking out through the gates one day and seeing her and saying, "Life is grand inside," and then marching away to leave her to the mercies of those who would force her fingers away from their hold. As he gazed out into the fog he was not ashamed that his eyes became moist when he thought of the little figure in the chair behind him, blindly trusting, in the face of overwhelming disaster, the stray words he had let

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drop to her and forgotten. He could see vaguely the sort of men who were pointing their fingers at her in her own surroundings—the Peters of Bermondsey and the Octavias of Ball Street. He squared his shoulders and thrust his hands deep into his pockets. He had always fought with the gentle weapon of words against the cheap cynicisms and the meretricious values of Peter's life, the worldly code which governed Octavia's existence. Now he was called upon to quit the guerrilla warfare of Mayfair drawing-rooms and fight a pitched battle, or desert for ever the Cause that he had lazily espoused for twenty years. Very well, he accepted the challenge. He would fight. He swung round suddenly and crossed the room to Molly.

"Will you marry me?" he said.

A little gasp escaped from Molly's lips, and her face went very white. Samuel Shine breathed heavily, and his hands flapped in a vague, silly sort of way.

It was the curate who broke the spell. He had taken a sudden step forward at the abrupt question, and his foot, catching in the chair at the desk, overturned it.

"I beg your pardon," he muttered, as he stooped to pick it up. When he rose he regarded the Duke sternly.

"I did not think, your Grace," he said, "that a man in your position could find it in his heart to make a joke of that description."

Henry laughed.

"Allow me to point out, Mr. Warden," he said,

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"that you are a very young man. A very nice young man, I am sure, but just at the age when we are sure that we know the whole world. Believe me, that is always a mistake." He turned to Molly.

"Do you think," he said, "that you would find it possible to get on with me?"

She got out of the chair and moved past him a little shakily.

"Don't, sir," she said suddenly. "You . . . you . . . it's just because you're a good man you say that. We haven't done anything wrong. It's the silly world——"

He regarded her gravely. The two onlookers found themselves completely ignored. As for Samuel Shine, nothing on earth could have loosened his tongue at that moment.

"My child," said the Duke, "I do not think it fair for you to suppose I could insult you like that. I have asked you to marry me. I want to know whether you feel you could ever care for me?" He offered her marriage as a man offers to put up another for a good club; but Molly could endure no more.

"Care for you!" The cry was wrung from her. "Don't you know that my whole world only holds you? Don't you know I love you so . . . so that it hurts like hell?"

The tears rushed to her eyes and blinded her. He put his hand on her shoulder. How could he have known this? The floodgates of human emotion had suddenly been let loose on Henry, the hermit

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of Piccadilly. It had never entered his head to guess that it was because she loved him that she had clung so tightly to her dreams. The one gift he had ever given her.

She was not a convert, after all, then, only a woman in love. But he had gone too far now; and, anyway, there was nothing else to do.

He bent down and kissed her hand, entirely unconscious of the inadequacy of the gesture.

"Then we may consider ourselves engaged to be married," he said.

The clergyman suddenly found his voice.

"Do you mean to say," he said hoarsely, "that you are willing to marry Molly?"

"Of course," answered the Duke shortly.

"In church?"

Henry smiled.

"Wherever these things are done," he said.

Then Samuel Shine spoke for the second time.

"There's something wrong 'ere," he said. "I'd rather 'ave two tenners."

Molly rose and came over to the Duke.

"But you don't care for me," she said. "You can't."

"Have I not asked you to marry me?"

"That is because you're sorry for me."

He looked into her large brown eyes which reminded him of a frightened hare, and realized that this pitched battle under the standard of his ideals had committed him to many things.

"I care for you," he said slowly, "a great deal—a very great deal."

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It was the first lie he had told consciously for many years.

She looked him steadily in the face for some moments, then suddenly gave a little sigh and turned away. It might have been a sigh of content, or it might have been a sigh of regret. Henry's knowledge of women was not extensive enough to enable him to tell the difference.

The clergyman held out his hand jerkily and with the other picked up his hat.

"I never thought," he began, "I never imagined for an instant . . ."

But that was as far as he could get. He turned round to Shine, who was staring at the Duke as if he were an exhibit in a museum.

"Come along, Shine," he said; "we aren't wanted here." He took the man's arm and steered him toward the door. As the cabinet-maker went out he was murmuring thickly, "Duchess o' Wynninghame! My Gawd! Duchess o' Wynninghame!"

CHAPTER IX

WIGS ON THE GREEN

ONE of the immediate results of the Duke's offer of marriage had been to remove the last doubt the curate had entertained as to the relations between him and Molly. Perhaps the sight of the girl had revived his original passion; perhaps he had been sincerely sorry for what he had done, and decided to make what reparation was in his power, though such readiness to pay debts was not usual. Anyway, the outcome was as satisfactory as it had been unexpected, and it left both the clergyman and the cabinet-maker curiously silent and puzzled on their way back to Bermondsey. In fact, Samuel Shine frankly did not believe his own ears.

This confirmation of the original suspicion was another by-product of the Duke's determination to adhere to his standard, which his Grace had not foreseen. It was always the inevitable that escaped his notice, the indefinite that engrossed his attention.

After the two men had left the room there came a long silence. She stood under the great window, knowing to the full the feminine ecstasy of belonging to a man. She was his. How sweet it would be to feel him hit her or kiss her! How she could revel in the joy of surrender!

These were the emotions which were flooding her

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whole being and threatening to bring the tears to her eyes.

She showed none of it. She simply stood under the window, her hands locked together, her big brown eyes half veiled by her lashes, looking gently out on her new world with the puzzled submission of one of Raphael's Madonnas.

And Henry, looking at her, felt curiously uneasy.

He knew the ambiguity of his sentence, "I do care for you"—he knew that it might mean one thing to her and another to himself. He did care for her, as he cared for all forlorn things and for so many lost Causes, for he was one in whom the protective instinct swamped altogether the ordinary emotions of a man toward a woman. Then he knew that he could never love her as a woman demands to be loved, and, moreover, he was not the kind of man who can live a lie, however good the Cause.

He must tell her and let her choose. Yet somehow, when he raised his eyes and saw her standing there, and realized how utterly she had given herself to him, the words would not come.

But the depths of feminine intuition were unrevealed to Henry, and it came as a shock to him when she asked suddenly:

"Why did you ask me to marry you?"

He did not answer. He could hardly explain that she was incidental to his justifying his creed to himself. That sounded too selfish, though it was undoubtedly the truth.

"You don't love me," she was saying calmly. "Why should you? . . ." (And all the time

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her heart was beating into her head, in its perverse womanly way, "Why shouldn't he? He said I was beautiful. Why shouldn't he?")

The Duke came slowly toward her and took her hand; he led her over to the armchair and sat down, pulling her gently on to its arm by his side.

"Little one," he said, as he would have spoken to a child, "listen to me. I have never loved any woman. I do not think I ever could love any woman. What you mean when you speak to me of love is an emotion I know nothing of."

"You are sorry for me?" she asked.

"Is that wrong of me?" The simplicity of his question broke down the pride which he had hurt.

"It is dear of you—very dear of you," she said quickly, her hand tightening suddenly upon his. Her dream-monger could do no wrong.

"When I offer you marriage," he went on, "it is because that is the only way in the world we live in that I can give you what I want to give you, what you are so very worthy of having—good dreams."

She said nothing.

"We are two of God's Babies," he went on, "and I offer you a share of my nursery. It has more toys in it than yours. Will you take it—on those terms?"

She dropped her head a little, and the curl that played about her ear brushed his cheek. He did not move. Like all girls, she had dreamed of the proposal she would one day accept, but how different those dreams had been from this!

Her voice was a little broken as she replied:

"You are a good man," she said. "I didn't know

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there were men so good. I . . . oh! . . .
I love you too much to let you go. You are too
wonderful."

"My dear," he answered gravely, "they tell me I
am a prig."

She looked at him equally gravely and replied:

"I will tell you that when you have kissed me."

He drew down her face and kissed her on the lips.
So he had kissed Mary Blake when she was a little
girl.

Molly raised her eyes and smiled.

"Yes," she said, "you are a prig. But I will make
you love me like hell one day. Am I the first woman
you have ever kissed?"

He nodded.

"And you?" he asked.

She was very much a woman.

"That is nothing to you," she replied, "for you
do not love me, and you have taken me on trust."

"My whole life," he said, "has been spent by
instinct."

"At any rate," she answered, still fencing with
his impassivity, "I know more about what a kiss
should be than you."

He smiled.

"They say," he said, "that we come naked into
the world; it is untrue. A woman is born with a
kiss in each hand."

She became suddenly grave again and a little
ashamed of herself.

"Will you let me try to make you love me?" she
asked simply.

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"I am not sure," he answered, "that it is not a wife's duty." But he was not thinking of love, and she knew it.

She drew her hand out of his after that, and sat for a long time on the arm of the chair in silence. Her thoughts followed one another like the waves of an incoming tide. She tried to be unselfish, to realize what his relations would say, what this marriage would mean to him—yet all the time something was telling her that none of his relations understood him as she understood him, or could give him the sympathy that she could give him—all these thoughts tumbled over one another in her mind. And then, like the bigger wave that flings itself contemptuously in as the tide rolls up and out, swamping the others and leaving them only a ridge of foam and splutter, so her great love for the dream-monger surged over her again until all other ideas were scattered, and she wanted simply to fling her arms round his neck and tell him that she was all his. But at the same time she knew that he wouldn't understand, so she got up, and going over to the desk, stood there a few moments nervously fingering the books and papers.

At last she turned.

"Very well," she said. "If you are sure you want it, I'll share the nursery with you."

He rose and crossed to her.

"Welcome, fellow Babe," he said with his old-world air, and for the second time he kissed her hand. And if her lips trembled as she looked over his bowed shoulders, he never saw it. He did not

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understand—how should he?—the dreadful nakedness of a love that is not returned.

And so, for a moment or two, they stood there in silence, a whimsical, ridiculous, tragical couple, whose union would be so much matter for the laughter or condemnation of Society. Yet, for all that, they had in their marriage a distinction which is not given to all—a pure, genuine emotion. She loved him with the love that no man is good enough to deserve from a woman, and he—he had, at any rate, plunged for an ideal, right or wrong.

Nevertheless, as a combination, Society would be justified in opining that no two people had ever asked so surely and certainly for disaster. Some such thought as this flashed through Henry's brain when she turned to him shyly and said:

“Would you like to take me to the Pictures?”

Of course, Henry might have known that Molly's idea of a honeymoon would not coincide with Octavia's, but the thing had never occurred to him at all, and this bald throwback to the courting conventions of Bermondsey disconcerted him not a little. He might, too, have realized that a great love is generally as crude in its outward and visible signs as a vulgar flirtation, and—oh, well! he might have remembered all the old and true sayings about little things not mattering and all the rest of it. But he did not, and if the truth must be told, the words which were running through his brain as he answered “Of course” to her invitation, were “My God! is she going to squeeze my hand?” Thus are great minds wont to waste time over trifles.

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As for Molly, she turned to Romance and the unreal as a bird turns toward the sky, and the cinema was one of the most complete of her pleasures. Naturally, therefore, to share it with him was her idea of a fitting celebration of their engagement.

And although Molly wanted to go to the Pictures and the Duke was afraid that she might squeeze his hand, yet something of the spirit of real Romance breathed over them at the moment. Society would have exercised an easy wit over the dilemma; and, indeed, Society was going to enjoy many a laugh over Henry's crusade, whereto, laughter being really rather uncommon, they are welcome. But for all that, when a smile comes too easily, beware of the wit that mothers it. A stone will make a tempest in a puddle, but only the winds of God can ruffle the surface of the Atlantic.

They were about to leave the room together on what, for the Duke, was a veritable voyage of discovery when the door opened, and Peter Graine came in with a white tropical helmet in each hand. He stopped on seeing Molly and looked questioningly at Henry, who realized that the first shots of his campaign were about to be fired. He resolved to open with a violent and paralyzing offensive.

He turned to Molly.

"Allow me to introduce you," he said, "to a very old friend of mine, Professor Peter Graine. Peter, this is Molly, who is going to be my wife."

Luckily the helmet that the Professor dropped was the one that he held in his right hand, so that it

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appeared that he only freed it in order to be able to shake hands with the future Duchess.

This he did with an effort at composure. His eyes rested on the Duke.

"Congratulations," he murmured.

"Thank you," said Henry imperturbably. He had never seen the Professor so completely at a loss. There was a moment's awkward silence, broken by Molly, who, looking smilingly into Peter's face, slipped her arm through the Duke's and remarked, "We are just off to the Pictures."

She had realized at once that she was facing the first of the many antagonists that Society was going to hurl against her, and the simple statement that they were going to the Pictures was a direct challenge to Society as personified in the unhappy Professor, whose mind was already a chaos of wild devices for getting the Duke out of this astounding engagement before Octavia could hear of it and appear at Wynninghame House to produce the inevitable tornado.

"I may say," said Henry, "that we are going to get married as soon as possible, as neither of us believes in a long engagement. It creates such tension for one's relations. No one has any right to be the cause of the agony of wedding presents."

Peter was gradually pulling himself together.

"I wonder, Henry," he said, "whether you could give me a few moments in private?"

The Duke laughed and Molly looked up at him; in the brief silence she managed to whisper a question into his ear.

"Are you quite, quite sure?" she said.

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And he, realizing what she meant, and with the lust for battle on him, answered:

"Quite sure." Then he turned to the Professor.

"Peter," he said, "there is no need for any hedging between you and me. Molly and I are perfectly well aware that our marriage will cause an outburst of unwarranted interference from my relations. Octavia will behave like a wildcat. You, if you had any hair, would be tearing it at this moment. Well, you might as well grasp our point of view, once and for all. We propose to marry each other, even if the Archbishop of Canterbury himself forbade it. We do not consider it anybody's business but our own, and we shall not hesitate to be rude to people about it. What's more, Peter, you know me to be an obstinate man."

He paused, and Molly, who was enjoying this open declaration of war immensely, took up her cue, fortified by her proximity to her dream-monger.

"Of course," she said, "I know I won't do, and shall be a hell of a guy as a Duchess, but that's his affair, isn't it?"

"You are putting me in a very awkward position," hazarded the wretched Peter.

"Not at all," Henry rejoined. "It's got nothing to do with you."

"But, Miss . . . Miss . . ." The Professor hesitated.

"Shine," said Molly. "I expect you'd like to know the worst about me. I've been a shop-girl, and my father is a cabinet-maker, and I'll love

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Henry till the cows come home." She felt very reckless.

"The whole thing appears to me——" began Peter.

"Nobody cares," said Henry, "how the matter appears to you. If I like a cabinet-maker for a father-in-law, what does it matter?"

"When your own father was a Cabinet Minister," said the Professor stiffly. "I am bound to say, though, it is a very unpleasant task. . . ."

The Duke took Molly's arm and they went to the doorway.

"It is a common mistake with people that they are bound to say things, Peter," he said. "There are just two accidents that will stop this marriage; one is if I am run over by a motor-bus and killed, the other is the end of the world. Meanwhile, we are going to the Pictures."

And they disappeared down the corridor and out of the building, while Molly, realizing that this was only the third time she had passed through the gates with the lions on the top, felt convinced that by some extraordinary magic she must have been turned into one of the characters in her silly books. The Duke, too, felt unaccountably gay in the knowledge that the first line of the enemy's defenses had been rushed and taken by storm.

Meanwhile Peter, alone in the study, his head a perfect whirl of amazement and perturbation, seized the telephone and fell back on his heavy guns, by asking in a hoarse voice for a trunk call to Elton Wick, which was the village where stood the Duke's

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country mansion, Wynninghame Towers. Octavia, he felt instinctively, would know what to do.

But, failing to get through, he rushed for a Bradshaw, and ten minutes later was in a taxi, speeding for Waterloo and help.

At the same moment Molly was squeezing Henry's hand at a particularly thrilling presentment of the pursuit of a horse-thief by a crowd of curiously handsome cow-punchers, and Henry was finding that the anticipation of things is always worse than the reality.

CHAPTER X

LADY BLAKE GOES TO TOWN

PETER gazed out of the window, as the train drew him swiftly toward Southampton Water, with an expression on his face such as a bulldog wears when it sees a rabbit disappear into a hole. The dog is utterly mystified, and so was the Professor. He had seen, of course, at a glance that Molly was a beautiful girl, and since to him womanhood was merely a question of samples, he could have understood and even sympathized with a passion that dared everything in order to consummate its desire. But with Henry this idea was out of the question. It was perfectly true, as the Professor had said, that he had no idea of the difference between a frock from Redfern's and an overall. Therefore he was not in love with Molly in the ordinary or Octavian sense. How, then? Henry was not the kind of man to conceal anything. If he had known the girl for long and had slipped into one of those passionless friendships which finally make men feel it is their duty to marry, instead of allowing the thing to rest on the foundations upon which it had been built, Peter felt sure that everybody would have known of the affair from start to finish.

What conceivable motive, then, could he have

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had? The Professor drew a handkerchief from his pocket and mopped his forehead. Perfectly baldly, the story he had got to tell Octavia was that he had left Henry apparently sane and healthy one minute, and found him engaged to be married the next. What is more, he knew perfectly well that he would be held responsible for it. Whenever the Duke got into any trouble which caused Octavia the annoyance of having to explain things away among her friends, she invariably attacked Peter, who was always about with his friend, as if he had been in a position to prevent the catastrophe. That is why, as his train drew nearer and nearer to Elton Wick, the unfortunate Professor mopped his brow with his handkerchief at more frequent intervals, and almost groaned aloud as he thought of the hopeless inadequacy of the tale he must tell to Lady Blake.

"He must be mad," he muttered finally as the train came to a standstill and he caught sight of Lady Blake's car, with Mary Blake sitting at the wheel.

"Welcome, Peter," she said, as he got in beside her. "I brought the car down myself because I thought you'd like to see me. Why have you come?"

The car started to wind up the hill toward Wynninghame Towers, and the Professor's courage seemed to ooze out as he caught sight of the chimneys peeping over the trees.

"Why did I come?" he echoed. "Because I wanted to see you, of course."

"Shall I tell you what you ought to be made

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to do?" she said. "You ought to write out a hundred times every day, 'I am bald.' I heard all about your behavior in Paris, Peter; you are a thoroughly undignified old man."

"Very well, my dear," he returned meekly. "How is your mother?"

"Oh! she's rather upset about things in general."

"Damn!" muttered Peter. "Of course, when I've got the plates ripped out of my keel, I strike a gale. What's she worried about?" he asked aloud.

"Gerald. Haven't you heard? He's engaged to be married. Mother says that if you get married to the wrong person you might just as well be a murderer and a forger and an anarchist, because if your wife's wrong nobody will notice little things like that."

The car turned into the drive and Peter began to wish that he had left Henry to his fate and washed his hands of the whole business. However, it was too late now, for there was Lady Blake on the steps and three minutes later he was sitting alone with her in the great morning-room of Wynnninghame Towers that always seemed to stand for the acme of comfort combined with the rigidity of aristocratic convention which was bread and meat to Octavia.

"Well, Peter," she began, "I got your wire. What are you running away from? Women or debts?"

"Neither," answered the Professor, and added weakly, "how are you, Octavia?"

"I'm the most harassed woman in England, Pe-

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ter, if you wish to know. What do you think has happened? Gerald has got himself engaged to be married to a tight-rope walker. I don't know which is worse, to be like Gerald and have no sense of decency, or like poor Henry and have no sense at all. I shall have to take Gerald up to Wynninghame House and Henry will have to deal with the matter in his capacity as head of the family."

"Boys will be boys," said Peter, feebly, beginning to think that catastrophe had him firmly in its grip.

"Thank you, Peter, for being so helpful," remarked Octavia crisply.

"I can't help it, Octavia," wailed the Professor. "I'm the most harassed man in England."

"What's the matter with you?"

"Henry is engaged to be married to a shop-girl."

Lady Octavia sat down suddenly and stared at him.

"Is this a new kind of wit?" she asked.

The Professor was annoyed.

"I don't go a hundred-mile journey in order to make a joke," he snapped.

She looked at him curiously.

"Did you say," she said, "that Henry was engaged to be married to a shop-girl?"

"I did," said Peter.

Octavia sat quite still for a few minutes, letting this fact become real to her. When she spoke, her remark was entirely typical of the woman.

"Is the engagement published?" she asked.

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"He only did it this morning," said the Professor.

"Then there is some sort of hope! Have you seen her?"

"For about three minutes."

"Is she an adventuress?"

"She is pretty, certainly; I suppose that is an essential in adventuresses."

Octavia tapped her fingers on the edge of the chair. She spoke impersonally to the fireplace.

"It's always the way with these ascetics; when they do get a disease they die of it."

"But," said Peter slowly, "I am perfectly convinced that Henry is not in love with her."

"Not in love with her?"

"That was the impression I received."

"Then why——?" The sentence remained unfinished.

Peter rose and went over to take up his stand on the hearthrug. He always felt safer there.

"The plain facts of the case are these, Octavia," he began. "At ten-thirty this morning I left Henry overfeeding a lizard; at eleven-twenty-five he introduced a girl to me as the future Duchess of Wynnninghame."

"Did he produce any explanation?"

"None whatever. He anticipated opposition to the marriage, and remarked that there was only one thing that would stop it, and that thing was the end of the world. The girl remarked that she realized that she would look a . . . er . . . hell of a guy as a Duchess, and announced it as her intention to lavish her affection upon Henry until the—cows

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came home. Then they went away together to a cinematograph performance."

Octavia listened to this recital with a frowning conviction that there was nothing left in the world that would ever cause her any surprise, and when the Professor stopped speaking she looked him gravely in the face for a few moments. At last, fixing him with her eyes, she said in a low tone:

"Do you think, Peter—that Henry is mad?"

But Peter, who had a deeper insight into things than Octavia could ever compass, shook his head.

"I think he is worse, Octavia. I think he is a perfectly honest man."

"What do you mean?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't quite know, myself," he returned, "but Henry has never been in tune with the world. He has cultivated himself intensively. I have a feeling that somewhere behind this affair we should find an overdeveloped sense of honor."

"Do you mean he is endeavoring to make things all right for a woman who has been his mistress?"

Peter laughed.

"Henry a man with a mistress!" he said. "No, no, Octavia—I don't mean anything definite, only I remember Henry saying to me once, 'If ever I do anything grotesque, try to realize that somewhere behind that is my theory of living.'"

Octavia shrugged her shoulders.

"What are we to do?" she asked. "That is the question."

"Indeed, yes," answered the Professor. "Sisy-

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phus himself had an easier task than breaking down the illusions of middle-aged men."

"Don't make silly epigrams, Peter," snapped Octavia. "What on earth induced you to allow Henry to get into a mess like this?"

"How could I help it, Octavia? I can't possibly keep pace with people who get engaged at that rate."

Octavia was silent for a few moments.

"Did you say she was pretty?" she asked suddenly.

"Yes. Why?"

"I was wondering which of us would have to go and buy her off; it's no manner of use your trying it if she's a pretty woman."

Peter felt immensely relieved.

"No," he said with emphasis; "certainly not."

"I shall have to do it myself," said Octavia with a sigh. "The sooner the better, I suppose. I'm beginning to think, Peter, that this ridiculous expedition of Henry's to the South Seas is going to fall out very well."

"By George, yes!" said the Professor, who had forgotten all about the golden toad in the catastrophe of the last few hours.

"Do you mind ringing the bell?" asked Octavia. "I'll find out the trains to town and go up this afternoon. After all, nothing is published. Perhaps it isn't so dreadful as it looks."

Inspection showed that the next train they could catch did not leave until six o'clock, and Peter felt a great deal less gloomy when he set out with Mary on a walk round the grounds before tea.

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"Why is mother going up to town?" she asked, as she stopped at an old oak to show him where she had smashed the lamps of the car the week before.

"Your mother and I have decided to elope," answered Peter gravely.

Mary sighed.

"I'm not in short frocks still, Peter," she said, "and I can quite understand the meaning of the word 'private.' But tell me, it isn't anything to do with Uncle Henry, is it?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"Because," said Mary slowly, "I think Uncle Henry is the best and finest man I know, and if anything happened to him I should be very unhappy."

"More unhappy than if something happened to me?" urged the Professor whimsically.

"So many things have happened to you, Peter, but nothing has ever happened to Uncle Henry—that makes all the difference."

And, after all, the wisdom of nineteen is often as much to the point as the wisdom of our elders and betters.

"You needn't be afraid," said the Professor, with a vision of Lady Blake's inexorable face, backed up by her very capable check-book.

But for all that, Mary was not satisfied, though she made no further reference to the subject and endured quite good-naturedly Peter's rather childish humor at the tea-table. The Professor could never get it out of his head that she was anything but

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the pig-tailed ragamuffin he had carried round the lawn on his shoulders ten years ago. A decade, when one has passed five of them, is essentially a thing to be ignored. And youth, not uncommonly, begins putting its spoke into the wheels of age long before it has been noticed about the place at all.

Meanwhile, Lady Blake and Peter went up to town.

CHAPTER XI

THE DUCHESS OF WYNNINGHAME

WHEN once she had taken a thing in hand it was characteristic of Octavia to go straight for her goal with as little finesse as the problem demanded, and the buying-off of a shop-girl appeared to her one of the simplest undertakings that had ever come her way during a life largely occupied in messing up other people's affairs. She knew Henry's obstinate nature, but she calculated that he would be just as determined to go on his ridiculous expedition as to persist in his ridiculous match, and she saw a very good opening for making the one militate against the other. Thus she was not as disturbed as one might have expected in the circumstances, especially as Society had had no time, so far, to learn of the Duke's indiscretion. As for Peter, the joy of finding himself unexpectedly left out of the campaign made him almost disgustingly cheerful as a taxi landed him once more at the doors of Wynnninghame House.

There was no sign of Henry as they went up the broad staircase and into the study, but scarcely had the Professor shut the large doors when the smaller one below the fireplace opened, and Molly herself came in. Peter gave an almost imperceptible nod in answer to Octavia's unspoken question, and received in reply a telegraphic signal to leave them

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alone. This, with as few words as possible, he did.

Of course, Molly knew at once that this was one of Henry's relations, probably summoned in a hurry. She felt a little flutter of excitement as it appeared that she was going to be given an opportunity to cross swords with her own sex in single combat. She would far rather fight under these conditions with Lady Octavia than under the protection of Henry. Besides, she held a trump card which she was determined to play only at the last moment.

Octavia entered the lists at once with no preliminary fanfare.

"You are engaged to be married to Henry, I believe?" she asked.

Molly nodded.

"I am his sister," went on Lady Blake evenly. "Of course, you do not expect me to approve of the marriage?"

Molly smoothed out her skirt and forced her voice to remain steady.

"You are Lady Blake," she said. "I remember the Duke saying you were an overwhelmer."

"It always annoys people who cannot take care of themselves," said Octavia, "when other people attempt to see that they don't get into trouble. Of course," she went on, "this engagement cannot go on; I will give you credit for enough sense to see that. At the same time, it appears that Henry has . . . er . . . put himself under an obligation to you, to say the least of it. I am sure you will

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agree with me that that obligation can be best discharged on a cash basis?"

She talked to Molly, who was standing at the corner of the desk, while she herself sat in the big armchair by the fire, as if she were a mistress discharging a servant. Molly said nothing.

"The only question is," Octavia was saying, "how much?"

Molly looked hard at her with real astonishment in her great brown eyes.

"Do you really think, Lady Blake," she said, "that people are like that?"

Octavia was at a loss. The girl seemed cleverer than she had imagined. She gave a hard little laugh.

"Oh, come," she said. "I know what you are going to say to me. That you love him, and true love is above all else, and all the rest of it. But need we waste our time over that? If you were really fond of Henry you would see that the last thing you should do would be to marry him."

Molly's heart gave a little jump of fear as Octavia said this. Was it not the very thing she feared most, that she would not be able to make him happy and would only succeed in making his whole life a burden of social pin-pricks? But again the whole wealth of her love surged up in her, and she put it out of her mind. If Henry had cared for Society-life and the conventions of his class it might have been different. Luckily he did not, and to Molly he was simply her dream-monger, for whom she would gladly die or do any of the myriad things in life which are worse than death. She followed her instinct, trusting that it

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would not cheat her, and knowing anyway that she had no other guide to follow. Bermondsey is not a university in which one can take a degree in any of the subtler arts, but a good instinct at any rate has less sophistry to meet there than in Belgravia.

"So I think," she heard Octavia saying, "we will cut all that out and see if we cannot settle the business in the least possible time. It cannot be pleasant to either of us."

"No," said Molly softly.

"Well, you're a pretty girl," returned Octavia blandly, "and you've made a fool of Henry, which is a far cleverer thing to do than you imagine, for he doesn't care at all about women, as a rule. You see, I admit you've been clever, and clever people are worth their money."

She felt from Molly's silence that she was getting on rather well; evidently the girl was not going to storm and rave in an endeavor to put the price up.

"What is your name?" she asked pleasantly, withdrawing her check-book.

"The Duchess of Wynnninghame," said Molly in a soft, caressing voice.

It was her trump card, and she played it with the dramatic instinct that is in all women.

"A little premature, aren't you?" asked Octavia.

"No," answered Molly, with the feeling of a buccaneer about to fire a mine. "You see, we were married an hour and a half ago."

Whatever may be said of Lady Octavia, she knew how to behave. She never doubted for an instant

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the truth of Molly's statement, for she had wit enough to perceive the genuine when it was laid before her. She rose and faced her.

"I am sorry," she said, "that I have been so rude as to sit while you were standing. I dare say your Grace will forgive my mistake—in the circumstances."

There was not a shade of malice or irony in her tone. Lady Octavia's code told her that Molly was now her superior in rank, and she behaved to her as she had been taught to behave. The ridiculous side of it she would never have been able to understand. But Molly, who saw in her words only a rather dignified and fine *amende*, held out her hand impulsively as she recognized one of the possessions which Lady Blake had and which she knew she could never hope to acquire.

But Octavia shook her head.

"No," she said. "Henry has made you his Duchess and you have been too clever for me—but we are enemies, and we shall always be enemies."

"Surely not?" said Molly. "Why?"

"I will tell you," answered Octavia. "I know nothing whatever about you, and for all I know to the contrary you may be the nicest girl in the world, but you are not of our caste, and when I have said that I have said everything. It is an unpleasant thing for me to say, for we do not talk of such things, as a rule, but it is an affair that means so much to me that I shall not rest until I destroy this marriage."

And by her tones Molly realized that she had said her last word as far as that was concerned.

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Yet, curiously enough, Octavia's iron pride was a matter for envy to her antagonist, who saw in it another sign of all the things that she would never be—and again the dreadful fear that her love would not be strong enough to break down these barriers which were already rising about her like the heads of Hydra swept across her mind and left her white and trembling before Octavia.

And this lady, in her foolish wisdom, thought that the Duchess was white with rage, so that the passage of arms, short though it had been, had shown the weakness and strength of each party as under the glare of a searchlight. The worst feature of battle is that even chinks in the victor's armor are apt to be exposed during the conflict.

Molly had nothing to say to Octavia in answer to her bare statement of facts. Truth to tell, Lady Blake, without knowing it, had pierced the heel of Achilles. It was this question of caste which was already beginning to torment Molly with its unreasonable disabilities, and which was to torment her a thousand times more than she imagined. Curiously enough, she felt very little elated at being a Duchess; she would far rather have been Mrs. Wynninghame, of Stockwell. That would have meant something. To be mistress of Wynninghame House seemed to make her more of a curiosity than anything else. Wisely, she did not attempt to defend herself against Lady Octavia, but simply nodded and said, "Yes, it will be very difficult for me."

Octavia, who had expected anger, was surprised and in her turn dumb. Thus it was a relief for them

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both when Henry appeared quietly in the doorway and came into the room.

Now Henry had not the slightest idea that he had entered at a dramatic moment, or that, in his hurried marriage, he had done anything more than an unusual thing. He had put it to himself that anything in the nature of an engagement would involve a great deal of argument with Octavia, which he desired to avoid, and a great many explanations to Society, which he was not prepared to give; whereas a *fait accompli* and a Duchess had to be taken more or less for granted.

Octavia was not one to mask her guns.

"I came up," she said, "the moment I heard of your intended marriage, in order to stop it; it appears that I am too late."

The Duke pulled out his watch.

"By an hour and three-quarters, Octavia," he answered cheerfully.

"You have been very quick," she said dryly.

"The Archbishop of Canterbury," returned the Duke, "happens to be a personal friend of mine, and special licenses are really quite easy to get."

"Thank heaven," snapped Octavia, "archbishops do not gossip!"

She turned to Molly.

"I wonder whether you would allow me ten minutes' conversation alone with your husband?" she said.

Molly looked at Henry, and with a little nod left the room.

"Henry," said Octavia suddenly, when the door

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had closed behind the Duchess of Wynnninghame, "I think it is just three weeks ago that you told me you never intended to marry."

The Duke nodded.

"You must have met this girl since then?"

Henry nodded again and reached for the cigarettes.

"You don't mind if I smoke, Octavia?" he said. "To be perfectly accurate, I met my wife before then."

"Oh! Where?"

"At the Zoo, Octavia. To be precise, in the Snake House."

"Very fitting," remarked Lady Blake bitterly. "What is her father?"

"I really forget," answered the Duke. "He makes something, which is more than I do."

"Oh, yes, you do," returned his sister. "You make trouble—wholesale."

Henry said nothing, and she continued:

"For some extraordinary reason you have fallen in love with this girl." Henry was thankful she had not put it as a question. "Well, I hope you understand that you are dragging the family in the dirt."

The Duke rose slowly to his feet and threw away his cigarette. A curious light smoldered in his gray eyes.

"Octavia," he said, "I think we had better understand one another. I do not expect you to sympathize with my marriage, and had you not come here I should not have attempted to talk to you on the

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subject. Now you are here, I wish you to understand that I am not open to argument of any kind."

Octavia gave a little gesture of disgust.

"A grubby girl," she said, "in a ready-made frock."

"An hour and three-quarters ago, Octavia," he returned, "that grubby girl became Duchess of Wynnninghame. I cannot allow the Duchess of Wynnninghame to be insulted. If you are not able to refrain from telling me that she is a disgrace to the family or that her clothes do not meet with your approval, I must ask you to leave the house, and not to enter it again until you are ready to treat its mistress as she should be treated."

Lady Octavia had not been prepared for this. She had expected Henry to be vague, even apologetic, but that he would ever threaten to turn her out of the house she would never have imagined. It was a new side of his character.

"Are we not getting a little heroic, Henry?" she said softly.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I fancy our class of people become heroic rather too seldom," he said. "But, however that may be, in this matter, Octavia, I can't be bothered with you."

Octavia said nothing. There seemed no answer to this. During her career Lady Blake had met with a great deal of opposition and had made a great many enemies, but she had never been ignored. There is no knock-out blow which is so effective when used for the first time, and Octavia cast wildly round in her mind for some new line of attack; she was

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still silent when the Professor returned. Peter noticed at once that Octavia seemed somehow to have lost her buoyancy. His heart sank. What new disaster had supervened?

"I was just telling Octavia," he heard the Duke saying, "that I cannot have her abusing my wife; it doesn't do, Peter."

"Your wife?" The Professor almost shouted the words.

"Don't make such a noise, Peter. Yes! I told you we did not believe in long engagements. We were married a couple of hours since."

Octavia rose and took a step or two toward the Professor.

"You are behaving like a child, Henry," she said. "A thing like this cannot be hushed up and ignored."

"Who wishes to hush it up, except you and Peter?" said the Duke.

Octavia's lips set in a firm line.

"You cannot present that girl to Society as your wife," she said.

"Damn Society!" returned the Duke. "I beg your pardon, Octavia, but that is my opinion."

"You cannot get rid of it by swearing at it."

The Duke swore again, softly.

"It's utterly sickening," he said. "I don't wish to have anything to do with Society. It annoys me and it despises me; yet it's always in my way. I cannot walk into the street without my hat but Society presumes to tell me I must put it on. I have even heard Society say that it is absurd for a Duke to take an interest in lizards. And now Society tells me my

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wife is all wrong. What have I done to it that it should always be getting in my way? I don't mind Society thinking I'm a lunatic, but I do object to its regarding itself as my keeper."

Octavia looked at him with a compassionate smile.

"Now listen to me, Henry," she said. "Whatever you may think about Society, it will always be with you, unless you go and live in a balloon. It will not accept that girl as the Duchess of Wynnninghame, and that is a fact which you cannot ignore. What is more, to anybody who has not completely lost his head it will appear perfectly obvious that she has caught you with her pretty face and demure ways. That is the worst of growing to your age without knocking about the world. You have not been in the habit of falling in love, so you don't know the proper women to fall in love with. As I have always told you, these things happen through lack of organization. Society will call your wife an adventuress, and neither I nor Peter will be able to deny it!"

The Duke walked over to the doors and threw them open.

"Good evening, Octavia!" he said. "I need not repeat what I said to you just now. I trust you will not be here when I return unless you are ready to respect the foolish foibles of a husband, which make it impossible for him to listen to people calling his wife an adventuress."

He went out and closed the doors.

"Damnation!" said the Professor. "Henry starts an avalanche on the roll and thinks he can stop it

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from falling with his eighteenth-century manners. What in Heaven's name are we to do?"

Octavia shook her head.

"In the first place," she said, "the girl is a great deal cleverer than I imagined she would be. She knows that so long as she holds her tongue and looks innocent it will be very difficult to deal with her."

For a long time there was silence between them. Octavia played with her gloves on the table and tapped out a tune with one of her Parisian heels on the carpet. Suddenly a slight smile spread across her face.

"Peter," she asked softly, "is this island in the Pacific a place where a woman could go?"

"Certainly not," he returned; "it's simply a swamp."

"Then Henry will either have to give up the expedition and look a fool, or else he'll have to leave his wife behind."

"He will not give up the expedition. I've never seen him so obstinate about anything in my life as he is about that mythical toad."

"When is the expedition to start?"

"Nominally in a week—but now——"

Octavia checked him.

"It must start in a week, Peter," she said.

"And if it does?"

"Given the absence of Henry, I have brought off more difficult propositions than the dethroning of the Duchess of Wynnninghame."

She went to a mirror and adjusted her hat.

"I am going back to the Towers now, Peter. The

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only thing you can do is to see that as few people as possible know before the yacht sails. One can dispose of rumors. I do not think Henry will publish the marriage. I do not think it will enter his head if no one puts it there." She turned in the doorway as Peter came up behind her. "The Dukedom of Wynnninghame is too old to be allowed to be thrown in the gutter," she said. And Peter saw behind the words an apology for the cruelty which he realized she was prepared to use against this girl whom she hardly knew.

The Professor followed her downstairs in silence. On the steps he looked at her and wondered whether it was good to be so hard; but at the same time he was glad Octavia was able to face the situation in the way he knew it had to be faced, and above all was he glad that he himself was not cast for the leading part in her programme. Peter was a selfish man, and it was his happy nature to be able to shelve unpleasant thoughts whenever, which was very seldom, they came to trouble his easy philosophy of life.

Thus the campaign on behalf of Henry's creed opened. Two simple souls were determined to uphold their right to make fools of themselves. The Duke was actually enjoying the opening stage of the battle. The doubts and pains of love were not his, and he was experiencing the exhilaration of the crusader. With Molly it was very different. Though she had always clung to the childlike romance which was one part of her nature, she had been brought up in a school of common sense, and it was

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not possible for her to compass the blithe disregard which Henry showed toward the future. She knew too much about the world not to respect it as an enemy.

In a country cottage, with only Nature looking on, she felt sure that, with all the love and service she was ready to lay at his feet, she could not fail to win his love in return. In Piccadilly, in a setting which only served to show her faults, it seemed as if the odds might turn out to be too strong for her. She felt so desperately alone, and she was afraid, dreadfully afraid, of Octavia and all that lay behind her. It seemed only too likely that while she grasped the very triumph of her Romance in one hand, she was to write its obituary notice with the other.

There was another blow in store for her when the Duke returned. His creed was so complete, and his opportunities for carrying it out had been so utterly unhindered, that it left him curiously egoistic. It had never entered his head that his marriage would in any way interfere with the expedition on which he had set his heart, and judging Molly by himself, he had never troubled to consider whether a six-months' absence from her husband immediately after the wedding would be altogether acceptable to his wife. The word "honeymoon" was meaningless to him. It is perfectly possible, had Molly showed the unhappiness she felt when he calmly told her that at the end of the week he was going abroad for six months, he would have swept the whole expedition out of his mind, as another sacrifice to the Cause he had determined to espouse, and, with what Peter had

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called his eighteenth-century manners, smoothed over any storm that arose. But no storm followed his statement, only a rather long silence and a hesitating hope that "he would enjoy himself."

He endeavored to interest her in his scientific pursuits and told her the story of the golden toad he was going to find, and though the subject did not interest her in the least, yet the way he told it, like some living fairy tale, brought back to her all the first love she had experienced when he was only her dream-monger, and made the tears all the harder to keep back. When he had gone she flung herself into the armchair and felt certain, for the first time, that she had made a mistake, that she ought never to have let him marry her, and that she could never bring him anything but unhappiness. And again she sent a broken prayer up to heaven, this time breathed, between her tears, into the ducal cushions of Wynninghame House: "O God—let me die if I make him unhappy."

CHAPTER XII

ON THE EDGE OF A VOLCANO

OCTAVIA told nothing of the Duke's marriage either to Mary or to Gerald. On the boy it could not fail to have a demoralizing effect. With a complete disregard both of the feelings of his relations and the dictates of caution, Gerald had got himself engaged to an ex-circus artiste with a reputation (both for her art and other things) which extended from Moscow to Los Angeles. The affair did not really disturb Octavia overmuch, as he had come to the age when a young man is morally certain to become engaged to someone, and it really simplified matters that the lady should be absolutely undesirable rather than simply ineligible—as, for instance, a governess. That, at any rate, was the way Octavia looked at it, and for a highly trained Mayfair mother the affair was really elementary. As for Mary, her mother had never understood her, and was not in the habit of telling her anything. Lady Blake hoped to get Henry away on to the high seas before matters became really awkward, and, with a clear field, she felt pretty certain of her own capabilities for dealing with the situation.

Meanwhile, Mary having been promised a farewell dance on board the Duke's yacht, the "Cobra," which was even now lying at anchor in Southampton Water, Octavia thought it best to allow the arrange-

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ment to continue, and manœuvre the Duchess out of the way rather than cancel the invitations and be forced to supply some explanation for so doing. What was her satisfaction, then, a few days later, on receiving a letter from the Professor telling her that Henry was arranging to send his wife back to her home pending his return from the South Seas!

To tell the truth, the marriage over and the first storm of indignation safely survived, the Duke had almost forgotten the existence of his wife, and had devoted himself once more wholeheartedly to the expedition. The difficulty before had been that Molly could not receive money from him because they were not married. Now that difficulty was solved, and as his wife she could buy as many books as she liked. That was as far as Henry looked. Already the affair had become almost an incident in his life. He slipped straight back, after his momentary exhibition of energy and decision, into his old habits of absent-mindedness, laziness, and leaving his hat on seats. He did not realize in the least that human emotions are dangerous things to play with or even to leave lying about, and that his marrying Molly had fired a mine that was ultimately to bring down the whole edifice of his self-made paradise clattering about his ears, while amid the ruins a woman was to rise up and bid him build a new and better one upon the débris.

But for the present that woman, thinking only of his happiness, had acquiesced meekly in a return to No. 3 Ball Street, and that very night, after being mistress of Wynninghame House for four hours, she

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drove off in the Duke's car, his kiss still wet upon her hand, back to Bermondsey; and had you asked her what she was thinking of as the great automobile drew her again toward the mean streets where for many years she had kept the pale flame of Romance alight, she would have answered truthfully, "Nothing." She felt that she had been caught up in a whirlwind of unreality, and was being deposited miraculously in front of her father's house again. She would not have been surprised had her father greeted her with the old formula, "Well, got a job?"

She was recalled by the voice of the chauffeur saying, "Is this the house, your Grace?" And in his last words she realized that she could at length answer her father in the affirmative. She had certainly got a job! She could not help wondering whether she would be able to keep it.

On going into the house she found that nobody was at home, so that the Duchess of Wynnninghame, avoiding from habit her father's windsor chair, sat down in the other, and realized for the first time that the springs were broken. They had been broken for five years, and it had been accounted the most comfortable chair in the house. Now it was dreadful, and she got up almost immediately. Thus it is to become suddenly a Duchess.

She looked round the room, and the black horse-hair of the sofa recalled suddenly the figure of Sidney Goyle, whose wife it was to have been an honor for her to become. She remembered it without a smile. The horror of that general accusation, when everyone had taken her guilt for granted, was not going

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to be effaced from her mind for many days. In certain matters Molly, like the Duke, had lived in a paradise of her own. Like the Duke, she was going to suffer for it. A feeling of dreadful loneliness came over her. She was a Duchess without a home. She went up to the little bedroom which she had shared with Gladys, and where she felt that something might remain which she could call her own. But this, too, had changed even since last night when she had slept there. The magic wand of the dream-monger had swept away in a moment all her old life; what had he given her in exchange? It only shows how dangerous it is to meddle with magic of any kind. Henry had yet to learn that the pebble thrown into a pond causes ripples that have no end.

Finally, Molly wandered into the kitchen, where Romance had looked like ending in a beating, and she wondered whether her father would find it as easy to thrash a Duchess. There she lost herself in a tangle of dreams and questions which she could not answer, wondering at the past and fearing the future, yet all her problems colored with a love that refused to give up hope.

And there, sitting on the dresser and swinging her legs, the family, returning from a triumphant tour of the homes of incredulous neighbors, found the Duchess of Wynninghame.

Samuel Shine regarded her in stupefaction for some moments; then his face settled into a grim smile.

"I knew it," he said. "What did I say? You've made a pretty set of fools of us, Em, dragging us

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round to tell everybody. He's turned 'er down and sent 'er 'ome. I knew there was 'umbug somewhere."

Mrs. Shine's rat-trap of a mouth snapped at once.

"Then she's not an honest woman, an' won't be," she said.

Molly got down off the dresser.

"I was married this afternoon, mother," she said evenly.

"Special license?" said Gladys, to whom no detail of the marriage laws was unknown.

"I don't believe it," said her mother. Only the production of the certificate served to convince her. When it was finally borne in upon the three that they stood in the presence of the Duchess of Wynninghame, their tongues seemed suddenly tied.

"And what is more," said Molly suddenly and indignantly, "I am not in the least an honest woman."

"The Lord 'as 'eaped coals of fire——" began Mrs. Shine feebly, but her husband cut her short.

"Shut up, Em!" he shouted. "It's a bloomin' miracle—that's what it is!"

"And what have you got to say, Gladys?" said Molly to her sister.

"Oh, you lucky!" ejaculated the mistress of "short'and."

She had some difficulty in explaining to them that she had come back to Ball Street for six months because the Duke was going abroad. She spoke of him always as the Duke, for it was some time before she got used to the idea of referring to her husband.

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"What!" said Gladys, after her sister had spent weary hours trying to make them understand the Quest of the Toad. "What, ain't there going to be a 'oneymoon?"

The question brought a blush to Molly's cheeks. "Not yet," she answered shortly.

That her family had an indisputable right to ask these questions annoyed her. On the other hand, their speechless amazement every time they realized afresh that they were talking to a Peeress amused her. They were untrained in the surprises of Romance, and this proof that fairy tales are never really impossible took them out of their depth at once. The mere fact of cooking eggs and bacon every morning at a quarter to eight for twenty years is quite sufficient to make many of us incapable of realizing that there is a great deal more in the world due to accident than to design. The illimitable possibilities of life get easily lost among its duller probabilities. The plain man is annoyed by the fantastic in theory, in practice he finds it an antagonist that disarms him at a blow. It is sometimes not realized how much importance we attach to motives in life. We pick up a morning paper and read of something quite outside our experience, quite in line with the methods of fiction. We can do it every day; a murder, an intrigue, a romance, a war. But if behind that we can read a motive, greed, love, or ambition, the whole thing becomes commonplace. Where no reason for an event can be found it quickly becomes a nightmare.

And the family could discover no motive for the

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Duke's marriage. For common-sense folk it is one of the most difficult things in the world to imagine an idea or a conviction running riot. Their emotions are orderly, schooled to a scheme, and they look upon life as a dull game, where the breaking of rules leads to the police-station. Wisely, they have consented to run in harness, and the unbridled colts of the world merely get in their way. A buccaneer has no real existence for them; a crusader is simply History. Yet there are buccaneers in every city and crusaders all over the world.

But it is, naturally, the instinct of the harnessed ones to be irritated with the buccaneer and impatient with the crusader. Thus, mingled with the pride of Molly's position there grew in the Shine family a feeling of irritation and rebellion against this unreasonable business. Mrs. Shine could find no precedent for it in her Bible, though her husband, driven to desperation, remarked that there was no reason to suppose that Adam wasn't a gentleman and that he married a thief. Invention, however, is sometimes Necessity's illegitimate child, and Mrs. Shine remained unconvinced of the presence of the hand of God in the affair. Gladys became annoyed for a more simple reason. Her friends in the City refused to believe her story. As for Samuel Shine himself, the first result of being a Duke's father-in-law manifested itself in an interminable desire among his friends that he should pay for their liquor. Like a great many people before them, the Shine family discovered that sudden fame is rather like hock in a champagne bottle.

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To Molly, too, unexpected annoyances kept appearing. She became tired and, curiously enough, a little ashamed of answering the same question, asked in awed tones by her girl friends, "Are you really a Duchess?"

She was quick to see that they felt something strange about her marriage, the honeymoon of which she was to spend alone. It matters very little what title your husband confers on you, what position or what wealth you may have achieved, some immutable facts remain, and one of them is that a newly married woman, even if she is a queen, desires to be able to exhibit her man. Thus at the end of two days Molly found herself more unhappy than she had ever felt under the old régime. Her friends with a not unpardonable jealousy became aloof, and partly because they were not certain how to address her, partly because they could not bring themselves to label with a title one they had known so long as plain Molly Shine, they gradually avoided her and left her alone with her glory.

She had nothing save a little housework to occupy her, and even the discipline of that was ineffective now that, by general consent, she was considered above it. The silly books in which before, had she so wished, she was able to drown herself, now seemed too silly for words. Above all, there was always with her the knowledge that her husband, for whom she would cheerfully have bartered her chances of heaven at any moment, did not love her, and, moreover, that she was debarred from exercising on him her arts or making any attempt to win his love for

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herself. She looked back to those few weeks in which she had carried the image of him in her heart under his letter, hugged to herself her love-affair with passionate jealousy for its privacy, and tortured herself with delicious dreams of what could never be, and saw that she had had happiness within reach of her fingertips then, whereas now that she had grasped it with both hands, there was nothing left.

Her father, a good-hearted man, realized that she was unhappy, and cursed the world ineffectually. Her mother dealt at length with the nature and ultimate fiery results of the sin of ingratitude. Imagine the added zest to a sermon preached at a Duchess! Gladys, with whom Molly had never had anything in common, was now intolerable in the childishness of her reflected glory.

Molly became more and more miserable. And Henry, forsooth, deep in charts and maps and specifications at Wynninghame House, was laboring under the delusion that he had made her happy, and as an extra testimonial to the Cause, had a vague idea that he would make her still happier on his return.

The first sign that the ripples made on the pond by the pebble the Duke of Wynninghame had thrown in were likely to go farther than the eye could see, became evident about three days after Molly's return home, when Mrs. Shine suddenly showed a desire to move into "a bigger 'ouse an' live in a style accordin'," on Molly's very liberal allowance. The determined opposition of Samuel, an essentially conservative man, who hated getting used to a new public-house much as a boy hates going to a new

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school, caused a serious tension in the Shine household. To Molly it seemed that her family could do nothing that was not sordid. And yet, for all her distaste, she felt ashamed of herself for being ashamed of them.

And then, suddenly, Mrs. Shine made a discovery the result of which was to precipitate matters very considerably. This was no less than the fact that her neighbors, after the first day or two of stupefied admiration, began to form twos of their own making and add them together. The non-appearance of the Duke, the lack of cars and coronets and tiaras, the sight of Molly cleaning the steps one morning, which had been whispered round the whole parish with awe, all told gradually upon their imaginations. In short, Mrs. Shine, four days after the return of the Duchess, discovered to her horror that a general impression was making itself felt in the parish that the story was not true after all.

This new development kindled the righteous wrath of Mrs. Shine past all bearing. It appeared that there was no limit to the number of crosses she was to be called upon to bear. She worked herself into a positive whirlwind of fury at the first sign of incredulity in Ball Street; her set form of prayer was augmented that night with a petition which was blood-relation to a curse. Her whole twisted and fanatic nature revolted at this injustice, and she tossed about in her bed most of the night, groping wildly for a means of redress. And just as the gray of the early morning insinuated itself round the corner of the blue blind, the solution came to her

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and she fell asleep. Mrs. Shine had suddenly remembered the Press.

On the next day—which was Friday—she dug out of a workbox an old card on which was the name of a reporter who had once been to see her about a local inquest, and made a pilgrimage to the address on its face.

The journalist, a somewhat decayed gentleman of fifty years, who had lived his whole life in anticipation of a scoop which never came, received her rather impatiently.

“Madam,” he remarked pompously, when she had told him her story, “your tale is ridiculous upon the face of it, and I am not sure if it does not amount to libel.”

“You’re a liar,” retorted Mrs. Shine, “and may the Lord have mercy upon you!” Upon which she triumphantly produced Molly’s marriage certificate. The journalist wavered; his life had seen so many disappointments that he could not believe in such a scoop as this purported to be.

“Very well,” said Mrs. Shine, “ring up his Lordship an’ ask him.”

There was such a note of certainty in her voice that his barrier of distrust crumpled and fell.

“If your story proves to be true,” he said, “it will be in every London paper by Saturday night!” His air of pomposity was ridiculous, but it impressed Mrs. Shine.

“You gentlemen ’ave got a power, an’ no mistake,” she said, as she left the house. And she returned to Number Three Ball Street, in the com-

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fortable assurance that by to-morrow night there would not be a doubter in the parish but would owe her an apology; and what she was owed, that Mrs. Shine was the sort of woman to receive.

And so telephone bells were set ringing and inquiries were set on foot through the mysterious channels at the disposal of the Press, and, since it was the Dog Days, it was determined that the Duke's marriage should be one of the headlines of the early evening papers for Saturday. Poor Henry's little campaign, seized by the gods as a splendid plaything, was like to make a nine days' wonder.

A modern prayer might well include a petition that we may live dull and uneventful lives and may never be raised to the Peerage, lest by chance the dragon of the Press, gazing hungrily out of his cave, may notice us, and all our little adventures, our little passions, our little tragedies, may only serve to make a meal for him and his babies, the great big public. And though other people's affairs make very good reading, one's own are apt to become a little naked in the transition from the home to the world. When Molly went to bed that night she had no idea that her Romance had been popped into the sausage-machine, and to-morrow would become a sausage.

And since the gods, once they get a plaything, are adepts at getting the best possible fun out of it, it happened that Henry left for Wynninghame Towers at ten-thirty on that Saturday morning, just two hours before the midday papers came out, for on that night he was to start for the South Seas in quest of the Golden Toad. He had quite returned

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to his old self, for he left his hat at Waterloo and his umbrella at the junction for Elton Wick, and, as Octavia remarked, arrived socially naked. As a Napoleon of Ideals he must have cut a very sorry figure as he drove up the avenue with his hair blowing over his face, but Mary, always stanch in her admiration for him, gave him a welcome which many an uncle might envy. Even Octavia greeted him without restraint. She felt she could afford to, for everything was going well. One thing alone was harassing: Gerald, lost to all sense of decorum, had brought his fiancée, a muscular woman of the name of Belle Ellis, to the Towers for the dance.

Peter Graine, too, looking forward to his change of air, and fully confident in Octavia's power to smooth out the creases at home, was in the best of spirits. Yet they were all to dance that night round the edge of a volcano. The Duke's ideals, with all their splendid errors, had long been innocuous within the four walls of Wynnninghame House. Now they were loose and stalking abroad. Henry was like a lion-tamer whose beasts have escaped. At no moment had he ever been less master of his fate. He had pitted his Philosophy against Truth, and he had underestimated his enemy. Rather, he had not estimated him at all. Truth was going to seize him in both hands, shake him till his brains rattled in his head, and put him down finally either a cynic or a man.

Meanwhile, Elton Wick, being one of England's tiniest hamlets, was impervious to the evening papers.

CHAPTER XIII

MOLLY'S DILEMMA

It happened that Molly, at the same moment that her husband arrived at Wynninghame Towers, was walking down Piccadilly alone. She had not dared actually to re-enter the house which was her own, but the place had proved, as before, a magnet to her, and she had been unable to keep away from its precincts. Yet it was by no means a thrill of happiness that the great gates gave her now. They merely served to remind her that for six months she would not look on her beloved's face. And after? Might he not have repented of his charity by then, and never give her the opportunity for which she craved, the opportunity to do him service? It never entered her head that, being his wife, he could not very well get rid of her without cooperation on her part. Molly, in many ways, was built on the heroic scale, and once she had felt he wished to get rid of her, she would have gone to any lengths in order to make his path easier. There is a heroism of service which is worthy of another Homer.

Thus the tears were in her eyes as the Duchess turned away from the palace of her lord and master and set her face toward Bermondsey. She was puzzled at the change in her family, the strangeness of her friends. She felt that she was not handling the affair in the right way, yet she could not see

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where the mistake lay. Like all people who are getting fogged in the art of living, she felt very lonely.

It was while feeling so that she suddenly caught sight of a newspaper placard.

"Peer's Secret Marriage," it read. For a moment she did not connect it with herself. She had never thought of her marriage as secret. The Duke had taken no pains to hide it. It was only when she saw a second poster, fluttering, like a frightened bird, in and out among incurious passers-by, that she realized that it was she who was providing England's after-lunch sensation on that day.

For on this poster, as clear as day, she read, "Marriage of Duke of Wynnninghame: Strange Story." For the first time she realized that she had married a public character. To those whose taste runs toward the picturesque, the flaunting mid-day posters may well stand for Henry's banner, whereon the device, as once upon a time, chronicled the piece of knight-errantry which won him his spurs—and lost him his peace of mind.

But Molly cared for none of these things.

At one bound, the pride which in her selflessness toward Henry she had been in danger of losing, reasserted itself and sent the blood surging through her cheeks like a tidal wave on a Devon river. She imagined the paragraphs, penned with a genius for mixing mental cocktails, laying bare the nakedness of herself and her home. It seemed monstrously indecent.

She opened a paper and read. It was all there.

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The journalist who had written up the story had only the barest facts to go on, but he seemed to Molly to know everything. Such is the power of quite lawful innuendo in the hands of the artist. She was not of the kind that derive a thrill of satisfaction from seeing their names in print. She looked around at the myriads of quite uninterested folk, hurrying past her. To her imagination they were all pointing fingers at her, staring at her; the new sensation, King Cophetua's beggar-maid who had been interviewed by the Press. She blushed again, raging. In the big affairs of our lives we are apt to confuse ourselves with the Universe. It appeared to Molly that the world gaped at her, and, like a real woman, she looked around her for a protector.

In her childhood it had always been to her father that she had turned in emergency. On more than one occasion he had actually comforted her. Samuel Shine had once been a very decent sort of man. Em and drink (they were two sorts of intoxication) had told on him, yet it was toward her father that Molly turned now. He must do something; it never entered her mind to turn to her natural protector, her week-old husband.

Thus, the paper crumpled in her hand, she fled back to Bermondsey and into the little front sitting-room.

They were all there, a paper spread out before them on the table. Mrs. Shine with her thin lips parted in triumph; Gladys, both elbows on the table, drinking in the journalist's little romance.

She looked up as Molly came in.

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"Oh, you lucky thing!" she said.

Molly stopped short suddenly.

"You've made a 'it," said her father with a contented smile; "that's what you've done." And Mrs. Shine nodded with an air of mixed pride and forgiveness for past sins. They were genuinely pleased about it.

"But — but," she stammered, "it's dreadful! Don't you see that it's dreadful?"

They stared at her in astonishment. Thus there was packed into one moment all the difference in nature between Molly and her family which had made her childhood unhappy and her maturity a succession of puzzles.

Her mother's face became hostile at once.

"We don't need," she said, "any of them fine airs. If you're too good for your family you can go. You've never been easy to get on with since a child, and if you can't see things as others see them, you'd better go to those 'oo can't. Rejoice with those that rejoice an' weep with those that weep—you'll find that in the Bible, an' you'll not dare gainsay it."

Molly stared at her. She could not keep back the contempt in her face. She picked up the paper.

"Who did this?" she asked.

"I did," said her mother. "If you think that my daughter being a Duchess ain't to be published in the streets of Ashkelon, you've gone up the wrong street yourself."

"Can't say," began Samuel Shine, "that I see anything specially upsettin' about it."

"Why, you ought to be proud as proud," said

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Gladys, snatching back the paper and eagerly eating up the headlines.

Molly felt all at once utterly lonely. There was no protection here. She felt as if she was standing naked on the steps of the Royal Exchange; she was a metropolitan Lady Godiva. There are people, even in our own age, who feel like that about advertisement, and they are not always to be found among the "refined."

One thing was certain, she could no longer remain in Ball Street. She could not face her friends with the knowledge that each one of them had cut out her little romance from the paper and was regarding it as a curiosity. She wanted to hide herself.

"I'm going," she said suddenly. "I can't stay here after this."

"Can't stay?" It was Samuel Shine who spoke, a genuine astonishment in his voice.

"It's no use trying to explain," said Molly quickly; "you wouldn't understand. It may be me that's all wrong—I don't know; but I must go."

She opened the door and Samuel Shine sprang up.

"You can't go," he said. "You've got nowhere to go to."

Nowhere to go to! The words stung her. She turned round in the doorway and looked at them.

"I shall go," she said proudly, "to my husband." There was something in the tone of her voice which stifled any remarks the family were about to make. By the time they were ready to speak the front door had slammed, and Molly had gone.

Her father summed up the situation with a sigh.

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"Always been the same since she was a kiddie," he said. "Something 'ad to bust."

In the street it appeared to Molly that her only course now was actually to go to Wynninghame Towers and ask Henry for the protection which he owed her. When she had announced her determination to go to her husband she had said it in pride and anger, and had had no real intention of doing anything but leave the neighborhood. Now it was being borne in upon her that it was the only thing she had left to do. She did not think overmuch about the wisdom of such an action, for once it appeared as a possibility, her desire to see him, which it had caused her such pain to suppress for the past week, swayed her judgment to the exclusion of all reason.

So she, too, fled to Waterloo, and was soon on her way to Elton Wick, very frightened, very indignant, and very anxious to see his face again. But all the time there was growing in her the sense that she was a married woman with certain rights which she could demand and certain concessions to her pride which she could insist on being made.

At Eton Wick, on asking the way to Wynninghame Towers, she discovered that she had nearly two miles to go, and there being no sort of conveyance available, she had perforce to set out on foot.

There is nothing which is more apt to assist the evaporation of one's courage than a lonely walk before one's ordeal, and by the time Molly turned in at the drive up to the Towers she was beginning to wish that she was still in London.

As she approached the house she heard the laugh-

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ter and shouting of people playing tennis away on her left. Her heart almost stopped beating, for she heard Octavia's voice above the rest, urging them to come in and dress for dinner. But she clenched her hands and went on. She had gone too far now to turn back.

Wynninghame Towers was a large Tudor building with an enormous courtyard to traverse before one came to the entrance hall. When Molly peeped into the courtyard she was overcome with horror at the windows, which seemed to her interminable and alive. She could not possibly pass beneath their gaze.

She slipped along the front of the house until she came to the French windows of the morning-room. There she stopped and looked in. Her heart jumped within her, for there, standing with his back toward her and trying on a large cork helmet, was Henry, and, miracle of miracles, he was alone.

She stepped quietly into the room.

CHAPTER XIV

THE ENEMY'S COUNTRY

NATURALLY, the moment Molly had entered the Duke saw her in the mirror. He turned round at once and took off the helmet.

"Ah, my child," he said. "It is really very nice to see you again."

She answered nothing. As usual, he had said the one thing she had not expected.

"If you had let me know you were coming the car would have met you," he went on. "Did you get a trap?"

"I walked," she said.

"Walked!" he echoed. "But how perfectly outrageous!"

"Henry," she began timidly, and then, seeing that he did not seem at all surprised, she took her courage in both hands. "Henry, have you seen the papers?"

"It is," he answered, "the supreme advantage of this place that everything is out of date by the time it reaches us. No, I have not seen the papers. I suppose they have an entirely false account of our wedding in them?"

"How did you know?" said Molly.

"My dear, it was quite inevitable. That is what papers are for. To provide interesting reading for uninteresting people, it is naturally necessary to make a little go a long way."

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She stared at him.

"But don't you mind?" she asked curiously.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"No," he said. "One cannot afford to. Why, do you?"

"I am so ashamed," she answered, "that I don't know what to do. I've left home because—oh, because they are booming me—it's horrid—dreadful."

She buried her head in his shoulder.

"They say all about me being a shop-girl," she sobbed, "and . . . and they call it a romance of love!"

"I am sorry. I thought you knew that that was bound to happen."

She said nothing, but simply cried on his shoulder. As a matter of fact, now that she knew he did not mind, she was prepared not to mind herself, but the joy of seeing him again and her exhaustion could only find its natural safety valve in what cooks call "a good cry."

As for Henry, he patted her head and wondered what he had better do next. It began to appear that a married man has responsibilities. The Duke was still vaguely playing with Molly's curls and asking himself what was the proper course for him to adopt, when Octavia, in the height of fashion as reflected in garden frocks, stepped in at the French windows. She stood for a moment at the window, absorbing into her system this new situation. Molly, her head still hidden in the rapidly dampening folds of Henry's coat, had no idea of her presence, and the Duke, though the imminence of a scene made him

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feel extremely uncomfortable, could not help smiling whimsically at his sister over his wife's head. The fantastic nature of the picture appealed to him. On the one side, Octavia, a living mass of etiquette and tradition, on the other himself, with his absurd creed and his ridiculous marriage—both he and his sister as obstinate as granite in their different ways; and between them, crying with an abandon hopelessly impolite, wonderfully pretty and amazingly unloved, the sad misfit that was the Duchess of Wynnninghame.

With a little shiver—for it was turning cold in the garden—Octavia came in and shut the window. Here, indeed, was a complication which she had not foreseen, and which looked like being very awkward to deal with. The Duke's marriage, as has been said had been announced to no one at Wynnninghame Towers, and it was no part of Octavia's plan of campaign to make it public thus at the eleventh hour. Moreover, there was the dance that very evening on the yacht which lay in Southampton Water, half a mile out from the landing stage at Elton Wick, and the lines of which were quite visible from the upper windows of the Towers. Being the first event of its kind which the season had yet produced, Society was going to grace it in large numbers, and anything in the nature of a scene in that assembly would be the worst kind of disaster which Octavia could imagine. Of course, she had no notion that many of her guests were to find an added piquancy in the dance by reading the well-written story of the marriage on the way to the yacht.

Molly looked up on the click of the window bolt

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and saw Octavia. She endeavored, out of a kind of protective instinct toward Henry, to break away from him, but to her astonishment and not a little to her joy, she found that his arm round her shoulders tightened its hold, and so it was for the first time that they faced Octavia together, literally in each other's arms.

"I imagined," said Octavia slowly, "that your wife had gone to her home."

"She wished, apparently," returned the Duke, "to see the last of me."

"Yes," echoed Molly.

Octavia moved across to the sofa.

"Not an unnatural desire in one's wife, is it?" went on the Duke.

"Not at all," answered Octavia dryly. "Only it seems a pity she preferred to enter the house through the window like a burglar."

"You came in at the window yourself," said Molly, surprised at her own intrepidity.

"One can take liberties with one's house," said Octavia, "when one has lived in it for twenty years." She examined her fingers carefully. "Are you going to stay to dinner?" she added.

"Yes," said Henry decisively.

"I asked the Duchess," murmured Octavia.

Molly stole a look at the Duke.

"My husband has invited me," she said.

"Personally," answered Octavia, "I was always given to understand that one's husband's invitations were those one should never accept."

"I wonder," said the Duke, as he placed a chair

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for Molly, "if you have ever realized, Octavia, how artificial you are."

"It takes an outstanding intellect," answered Octavia, "to rise above its education."

"It appears an easy matter, however," said Henry, "to sink below it. You cannot persuade me that you are the triumph of upper-class education. If so, by all means abolish the House of Lords."

"I don't pretend to be clever, Henry; I merely say I am not a fool."

The Duke smiled gravely.

"That, again, is a pose," he answered. "You know perfectly well that you are clever. What you do not realize, apparently, is that you are merely clever. Now there are some things in life to which the application of cleverness is like trying to build a battleship with a sixpenny hammer."

"Such as?"

"Such as simple ideals and love."

"On the other hand, Henry, common sense can be applied to both."

"It can. So could prussic acid be applied to you, and with the same effect."

The Duke turned to his wife.

"My dear child," he added, after a pause, "naturally you will dine with us to-night, and, I hope, come on board the yacht to the dance afterward." He touched a bell. "If I may advise, I should go up to your room and make yourself tidy. In my presence, of course, your hair can come down as much as it likes, but with other people——" He broke off as Dunn appeared in the doorway.

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"The Duchess has arrived unexpectedly, Dunn," he went on. "Show her to her room and send Miss Mary's maid to her."

"Very good, your Grace," answered the valet.

But the prospect of a maid was too much for Molly, even with her newborn courage.

"Crikes, no!" she said. "Not a maid!"

"Just as you like, my dear," said the Duke, and Molly went out of the room, followed by the invaluable Dunn.

For some moments Octavia regarded her brother in silence.

"Have you realized," she said at last, "that that girl has got nothing to wear?"

The Duke was about to reply when he was interrupted by the entrance of Peter Graine, hot and dishevelled from a game of tennis.

"My word, Octavia!" said the Professor. "I beg your pardon. I didn't know you were here, or I'd never have come in in this state. My last game of tennis for six months, Henry. After this, deck quoits for exercise."

"Peter," said Octavia solemnly, "the very worst has happened."

"Eh, what?" said the Professor. "What's Henry done now?"

"She is here," said Octavia. "She is to dine with us in a Mile End Road creation—she is to dance Bermondsey dances on the yacht; she is to meet the Countess of Edgeware and Lord Henry Fairlees, who blackballed Mr. Pennington-Gore because he wore a tie pin in the shape of a horseshoe at the

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Pantheon. She is to grace the first ball of the season as the Duchess of Wynnninghame."

"Which," said Henry softly, "happens to be her name."

The Professor stared helplessly at Octavia.

"But it is out of the question," he said. "Look at the effect it will have on Gerald, whom you are trying to disentangle from his tight-rope walker."

"If the Duchess of Wynnninghame is so impossible, Peter," said Henry, "surely it will be a splendid object lesson for Gerald. Not that I have by any means made up my mind that Miss Ellis would not be an admirable woman for him to marry. I confess she seems rather crude to me, but that may be because I have not been fortunate enough to mix with tight-rope walkers. Anyway, I should be the last to interfere with anything Gerald wished to do."

"I," said Octavia firmly, "should be the first."

The Duke rose.

"Of course you would, Octavia," he said. "You'll probably succeed in driving them more firmly than ever into each other's arms. As I said, cleverness is the last weapon to use against love."

"Love!" echoed Octavia scornfully. "You have admitted again and again that you know nothing about it!"

He nodded.

"That is why I treat it as an enemy," he said, "and am taking the trouble to try to discover what is the most effectual weapon with which to deal with it."

"And what is it?" cried Peter in desperation.

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The Duke shrugged his shoulders and opened the door.

"Not the epigrams of 1880," he said. "It is getting late, and I am going up to dress for dinner. With regard to the Duchess, I propose to announce the marriage and introduce my wife to the family before dinner, in here. I'll be glad if everybody is present. I wish to make the announcement myself, Octavia, please."

"Very well, Henry," said Octavia dully. The immensity of the catastrophe was beginning to dawn upon her, and the realization had robbed her of repartee.

The door closed softly behind the Duke, and left his sister and the Professor staring at each other.

"My God, Octavia," said Peter. "It's impossible! Henry must be a fool—a damned fool." He recovered himself quickly. "I beg your pardon," he said.

"You are quite right, Peter," answered Octavia as she opened the door. "Henry must be a damned fool."

As a last word on the situation it seemed a trifle inadequate.

CHAPTER XV,

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IT is a curious trait in the characters of human beings that the imminence of a trial of strength, to which they have looked forward with considerable apprehension, produces an entirely unexpected confidence in the result. What we fear most is what is going to happen to-morrow. To-morrow comes, and we realize that human nature is a machine that has never tested its highest running capacity. There is always a little more speed to be got out of it. The impossibility of the old injunction, *γνώθι σεαυτόν*, is what gives life its zest and joyous mystery. We are all of us engineers, and none of us knows the point at which our pressure gauge will burst. In the crises of life the man or woman who knows how to live will gamble merrily with their own capacities. Molly, who had refused to be taught, knew very well how to live. She had, what is more commonly found among the uneducated classes than the rest of us, a complete knowledge of her limitations. She knew that in the warring of words she was a child in the hands of Octavia, and she felt a babyish awe and admiration when she saw her husband utterly unabashed before his sister and returning thrust for thrust with entire lack of effort. This part of Society technique she knew would always be a closed

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book to her. On the other hand, she knew that her capacity for loving her dream-monger was entirely unlimited, and in a vague way she realized that this was a weapon before which Octavia was powerless.

As she followed Dunn up the staircase and along the tortuous passages of Wynninghame Towers, she experienced an excitement which was like champagne running through her veins. She would show the Duke how high she could hold her head. He should see she would not disgrace him. For a brief moment she realized the triviality of these forces that were being brought against her, the Lares and Penates of Good Form and the tenacious parasites of an honorable tradition. Convention is a good and a beneficent goddess, but she was unfortunately born blind. It would have surprised Octavia not a little to learn that the traditions that burned so brightly in Molly's soul were precisely the same as those which had won his spurs for the first Duke of Wynninghame—the traditions of loyalty, love and honor. These are commodities which no one has yet succeeded in cornering.

She was shown into a large bedroom, the white-and-gold panelling of which made an instantaneous appeal to her love of bright things. Like all of us when we enter a room for the first time, she moved instinctively toward the windows. It is perhaps significant of the fact that four walls are not really good companions for anyone. Terraced gardens ran down far below her window to the belt of woods which surrounded the estate, and through which she had made her way with so many misgivings not very

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long since. Away over the trees through the bluish haze which was the herald of the summer night, she could see the water still loyally throwing back the last rays of the sun, and out beyond she saw the outline of the yacht which was to take Henry to the other ends of the earth. But she brought her eyes quickly back to the gardens and the trees, and breathed deeply in the beauty of it all. These, she felt, were the things that she was made to love, the sweet and simple joys of living—the quiet and the romance of the world. How much better the trees and the grass and the homing birds than the hectic gayeties of Piccadilly and the stern splendors of Wynninghame House!

She turned and realized with a start that the valet was waiting. A week ago he had been her superior. To-night he was her servant. She did not trouble to think much about that, but to Dunn, who was a man to whom all the ironies of life made their appeal, the comedy of this quick change appeared matter for amusement. The world, thought the valet, was a whimsical place, and one need never go to the theatre for one's comedies. But in his grave eyes lay sympathy for the newly made Duchess. Perhaps Molly saw this kindness peeping out, for she turned to him suddenly and said:

“Do you think I'll do?”

The valet raised his eyebrows.

“It is no part of my business, your Grace, to be a critic.”

She shook her head.

“You could teach me so much,” she murmured.

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"Only the things that do not matter, your Grace," he answered.

She stretched out her hands toward the window.

"Oh!" she cried. "Fancy dressing for dinner when that is there! Do you think the trees laugh at us?"

He said nothing. He could not follow her fancy so far. She turned again.

"You will teach me, won't you?" she said.

"I will tell you anything you wish to know, that I can, your Grace," he said, and she felt that she had made an ally.

"Shake hands on it," she said impulsively. "P'r'aps I'll pull it off, after all."

He took her outstretched hand and ratified as curious a compact as was ever made between mistress and servant, and then, as she turned once more to the window as if she could not leave the vision of that fast-disappearing landscape, he stepped quietly out and when she turned again she was alone.

But in the servants' hall, where the word of Dunn was the mandate of the hour, the valet took occasion to point out that the new Duchess was an unqualified success. For these things are a matter of momentous interest to servants.

Annie, Mary Blake's maid, was inclined to be supercilious about the matter.

"No luggage!" she said shrilly. "That's a nice thing! How can you know what sort of a lady she is till you've been through her boxes?"

Dunn laughed.

"Seems to me," he observed, "that anybody who

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employs servants is a fool. I suppose you judge all your mistresses by the color of their petticoats?"

"Shows how much you know," returned the maid wickedly. "The first thing to look at is the heels of their stockings, and then—— But I'm not going to satisfy your curiosity, Mr. Dunn. What I want to know is, is she worth dressing?"

"Go up and see," remarked the valet. "I haven't seen the heels of her stockings."

"Yes," persisted Annie, "but you know what I mean. What do you think of her?"

"I? I consider her Grace is admirable in every way."

The deep silence that followed the remark indicated that this was looked upon in the servants' hall as an official statement.

"What's her figure?" said Annie, turning, on her way out, in the doorway.

"Much the same as Miss Mary's," answered the valet.

Annie selected a frock from Mary Blake's ample collection, and knocked primly at the Duchess's door.

"Come in," said Molly, who had spent her time undoing and rebuilding her hair.

The maid came in and shut the door. She gave one practised glance over the Duchess and decided at once that she was a worthy subject for her work.

"I am Miss Mary's maid, your Grace," she began.

"Oh, but I . . ." The words died away as her eyes fell upon the glory that was Mary Blake's evening frock. A "creation" has been the Waterloo of many a woman's resolutions.

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"I brought one of Miss Mary's gowns, as your Grace did not bring your own. I think it should suit you, your Grace, if you would care to wear it."

"But what will she say?" hazarded the Duchess, never taking her eyes off the frock.

"I'm sure she'll be very honored," said Annie; "especially as I know she is going to wear her white to-night."

Somehow or other, Molly found herself in a chair, with her hair down her back once more and her curls crackling indignantly in swift professional hands.

"Miss Mary comes in so late from her tennis, your Grace, I'll be done with you just in right time for her. She'll want extra time to-night, though, for the dance. I wouldn't like to dance on board ship—not if it was me. Mortal terror I'd be in all the time. But there! some people will dance on Judgment Day."

The voice babbled on while the skilful hands coiled and uncoiled, bullied and cajoled, caressed and belabored the rebellious tresses of the Duchess. Molly realized, in a sort of dream, that to look in the glass was going to be a great adventure. . . . The gorgeous luxury of having someone standing behind you, making you beautiful, the certainty that that person knew how to get the last ounce of fascination out of her raw material, the knowledge that when you looked at yourself in the mirror you were going to see something you had never seen before—all this for the very first time in your life—did you ever experience such a whirlwind of excitement,

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Neæra, even if your hair were to be far too well dressed to allow anyone playing with its tangles? It was a new kind of joy that Molly was sampling, the joy of being managed, of being "produced." And as the maid patted the last curl into place and imprisoned the last rebel that was trying to escape down Molly's neck, the Duchess realized that she could command this blissful hour every night for the rest of her life. In the vulgar phrase, Molly had tasted blood.

And then the frock, with which Annie performed absolute miracles in order to make it look, as indeed it finally did, as if it had been made on Molly's back. Never before had the girl worn an evening gown, and she gazed in an awed and shy way at her bosom, much as a baby looks at its toes. It rose and fell in a most immodest fashion, thought the Duchess. She could not help feeling that there was something very indelicate in allowing all the world to see you working, so to speak. Like a clock with glass sides. She wondered what her mother would say, and she wondered, too, why it was that she knew that it was beautiful, and was unashamed. The maid wheeled a great pier-glass in front of her, and at the first glance she knew that if all this loveliness was evil, she must perforce become a disciple of the Devil.

As for Annie, she stood and looked at her handiwork as Botticelli must have looked at his completed Madonna.

"Is your Grace satisfied?" she asked.

"I think," returned Molly, "that you must be very clever." The maid smiled with pleasure.

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"Your Grace is very kind," she said. "May I go to Miss Mary now?"

"Yes, yes—of course you can," said Molly, in a surprised tone; one cannot get used to being a Duchess all at once. As the maid reached the door Molly could not help asking a question.

"Is Miss Mary as pretty as me?" she said ungrammatically.

Annie smiled.

"Oh!" she said; "she's the fluffy sort, your Grace; pretty, yes—but beautiful—well, we all think different, don't we, your Grace? But they don't repay labor, not like the dark ones do."

She slipped out, and her verdict in the servants' hall was that "her Grace was a bit familiar at present, but that would wear off, and a more beautiful picture she'd never wish to see." Meanwhile Perrin, the butler, who had gone down to the station on business, had lighted on an evening paper, which he had brought back, so that it turned out, as usual, that the servants' hall was in full possession of the facts before the upstairs people knew that anything had happened at all. And, being kindly folk and enlightened Liberals, they wished the Duchess luck and prepared to serve her well—all except the cook, who was a Conservative from Devonshire, and was understood to refer to the time when she was a girl as one in which folk knew their place, whereas nowadays there was room for doubt as to what the world was coming to, not that it was her business or ever likely to be—but there it was.

Meanwhile, the Duchess sat before her pier-glass

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and wondered why she had never thought of doing her hair that way. And as she gazed and gazed at her radiant reflection, the woman in her asked again and again why Henry did not love her. He knew that she was beautiful; he had said so. Yet she felt that he would not notice whether she appeared in a ploughman's smock or a miracle from Paris. Would he notice to-night?

She looked down at her rich young arms and wondered whether everybody else would be wearing bangles, and she ran her finger round her neck and hoped the absence of a necklace would not prove to all that she was only a pretense Lady. And then she sat down and folded her hands round her knee and gave herself up to the most delightful thoughts in the world. But what those were no gentleman would be uncouth enough to ask, and every lady will know beforehand, so there is no need to enumerate them here. Suffice it to say that quite a considerable time elapsed before the booming of a great gong told her that the time had come when she had got to enter the arena and tremblingly await the verdict, the lowering or raising of the thumbs.

She crept down the stairs on tiptoe; why, she could not have told you. Half-way down she stopped. Voices could be heard in the drawing-room.

A panic seized her, and for a moment she almost ran away upstairs again to hide. But that would have been to disgrace him.

Again, according to her quaint habit, she sent a mad little prayer flying up to God. "O God," she

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breathed, "watch over me at dinner, and see I do the right thing with the knives and forks and things." Only the very best of us can make a request like that and know that they will not laugh in heaven.

The butler bowed to her in the hall, and she smiled to him bravely enough. Though he had but just completed the journalist's account of the shop-girl's marriage, Perrin found that it needed no effort at all to treat this lady as a Duchess.

He put his hands upon the door-handle, and her heart beat very fast indeed. She suddenly became conscious of nothing but the bareness of her bosom. It appeared to her a monstrous and grotesque indecency.

CHAPTER XVI

CRUSADERS

THE collection of humanity which had gathered in the drawing-room before dinner was quite interesting in its several ways. There was Lady Octavia, wonderfully turned out, whose icy exterior was finding it still a little difficult to hide the turmoil of anxiety which was going on in her brain. There was Peter Graine, whose bald head always, unfortunately, glistened immediately before and after a meal. Complete silence and continual application of a large silk handkerchief to the inside of his collar served to indicate the Professor's state of mind. Then there was Gerald, who, with a fine disregard both for his mother's wishes and the dictates of good taste, had brought his fiancée to Wynninghame Towers for the dance, and was thus privately under a cloud. But he bore up under it wonderfully. The truth was that as Lady Blake had never ceased to nag him throughout the whole of his boyhood, first on one trivial count and then on another, complete disregard of her wishes had become a habit with Gerald. As for Belle Ellis, the tight-rope walker, she was probably the least interesting person in the room. She was completely obvious, from her type of beauty to her intentions. A large muscular woman probably the wrong side of thirty, with a bold, dark beauty and large hands. She was wise enough to make no effort to ape the manners of Society, and

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her ordinary conversation was freely interlarded with slang from every quarter of the globe. Like Ulysses, she knew men and cities well, the former probably a great deal better than he did. She managed to get on perfectly well in the rarefied atmosphere of Wynninghame Towers, or thought she did, which amounted to the same thing. As Peter had said of her, she was used to balancing herself in mid-air. Of course, she had carried Gerald right off his feet, as any woman who has large eyes and a fund of risky stories from every capital in Europe and the East will overwhelm any young man of twenty years. Gerald imagined himself genuinely in love with her, and had even been overheard talking to his friends of a grand passion. Some of these friends related the affair with great gravity to their fathers, and quarrelled with them at once when they began to talk sense. Old Mr. Pardoe-Vine, an octogenarian friend of the family, who felt that the country owed him a peerage at least because he still drank a bottle of port after his dinner, in order to keep up the tradition of the roaring forties, and who was always called Prometheus by his intimates, because of the hazardous condition of his liver, had been genuinely pleased at Gerald's misdemeanor, remarking only that wild oats were not what they were, for in his day there would have been no question of an engagement.

Mary Blake, whom it was fashionable to describe as a "dear, sweet girl" among people who had no idea either of the depth of her emotions or the range of her intelligence, both of which were considerably above the average, had not yet appeared.

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The Duke came in upon this assembly in a state of perfect composure. As he entered the room Miss Ellis turned to him.

"I think it's perfectly sweet of you," she said, "to go all the way to the South Seas to give us an excuse for this cute little dance."

"But that," said Henry, "is not the sole object of the expedition."

"It's all that matters," put in Gerald.

"I've never been nearer the South Seas than 'Frisco," said the tight-rope walker. "That's the devil of a place, you bet. I remember one night there an old guy, who looked like a bishop, got oiled, and loosened up, and he spun one of the funniest yarns I've struck yet. It went this way: 'There was an oil-and-tar merchant——' "

But Gerald, who had heard the story before, broke in.

"Hasn't the gong gone?" he asked hurriedly.

"No," said Henry. "I have an announcement I wish to make to you all before dinner. Where is Mary, Octavia?"

The question was answered by the arrival of Mary herself in a high state of excitement. Annie had already told her the amazing news.

"What I wish to tell you all," said the Duke calmly, "is that I was married a week ago to-day."

"Oh!" gasped the romantic Mary; "and we've missed the wedding! Mother, did you know?"

Octavia endeavored to smile.

"Hints were given to me," she murmured.

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"My wife," went on Henry, "has unfortunately come down without any evening gowns—so I will ask you to excuse her to-night."

"You won't have to," said Mary. "She's borrowed one of mine. Oh, Uncle Henry, I do hope you will be happy."

He kissed her affectionately.

"As you have so often told me," he said, "all married people are."

"Well," said Gerald slowly, "it's been a bit of a surprise; we're all awfully glad, of course."

"Thank you," said the Duke. "But as the evening papers have a full account of the affair in them to-day"—here Octavia went extremely white—"I wish to tell you a few more of the facts. My wife was a shop-girl." He made the remark entirely undramatically. "And I am sure very good at her job," he added, vaguely.

Octavia winced perceptibly. Surely Henry was not going to enlarge on the subject in public?

She rose.

"It will be annoying," she said, "if dinner is late, as we have to get down to the yacht. I dare say, Henry, you would like to defy convention and take your wife in to-night?"

He could not but admire her self-control. It seemed that he could almost hear his mother's voice. He nodded.

The gong boomed its evening message through the house, and Peter Graine started to talk very quickly about the expedition in an effort to lift the situation. Octavia had recovered and was already

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revolving in her mind possible solutions of the evening's catastrophe.

Only Mary did not disguise her anxiety to see the Duchess, and so it was she who was standing opposite the door when Perrin threw it open and announced, "Her Grace the Duchess of Wynnninghame."

And so Molly came into the room, the butler's sonorous announcement leaving her completely tongue-tied. And Henry himself, who had not expected to see her like this—her hair done by an artist, her gown throwing up all her young beauties, so that she looked as if she had but stepped down from some picture in a gallery of artists' dreams—Henry, too, was tongue-tied. While the Professor, being quite the most susceptible man in the room, said "My God!" quite audibly, and then in a panic searched hurriedly for his pocket handkerchief. And Molly, being a thoroughly natural girl, knew perfectly well that it was her beauty which was causing all this confusion.

"I beg your pardon, my child," said the Duke suddenly. "I must introduce you." Somehow Molly wished he would not say "My child."

"This is my niece Mary," he was saying, and the girls shook hands, while there was in Mary's eyes that frank admiration which is so rare in one woman to another.

"Oh, yes," said Molly simply. "I'm wearing your frock. I hope you don't mind."

"You look simply splendid in it," said Mary, and Molly knew at once that she was a dear.

The other two introductions were effected, though

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Molly shied rather at the cosmopolitan Miss Ellis, and wondered whether here she had to meet another antagonist of a new and unknown type. As for Gerald, he was not unnaturally shy, partly at her beauty and partly because of the curious scene that had led up to her entrance. Octavia, of course, though the steel-gray of her eyes never changed or softened, behaved brilliantly, and became in a moment the hostess of her brother's wife—a part she played so well that simple Molly was completely deceived and believed her change of frock had worked a miracle. The Professor sat covertly glaring at Henry, while his bald head glistened protestingly against the evening's outrageous events. It was rather a relief when the announcement that dinner was served bade them make a move to the dining-room.

Do we ever realize the amount of training that is necessary before a man or woman can become technically perfect in the art of eating the evening meal? We go in to dinner by rule, we eat by rule, we leave it by rule. The whole thing is a meaningless labyrinth to those who have spent their lives content with the lesser intricacies of high tea. Why do we not take each other in to breakfast? Our tempers, perhaps, would not stand the test so early. The truth is that the elegancies of life are out of date. We are not an elegant generation. We lean more toward the grotesque than the picturesque; it was one thing to lead a lady delicately in to dine when you wore something very chic in the way of knee-breeches and had taken quite as long over your hair

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as Mademoiselle herself. It is quite a different business when the lady is showing twice as much leg as you are, and the utmost limit of your decorative darning is a piece of insignificant braiding on your trousers and a mildly pretty set of waistcoat buttons. It is true that we are probably in a better mental condition than our forefathers, who were called upon to pretend that ladies had no legs at all, but, for our manners, when the spirit has evaporated, what is the use of parading the letter?

Henry, it is true, succeeded fairly well in combining eighteenth-century deportment with twentieth-century surroundings. But even with his advantages the result was sometimes grotesque and always a source of irritation to his friends and relations.

Dinner at Wynninghame Towers was always formal. Lady Blake's mother had been a woman who saw, in the loose manners which even in her younger days were growing up strongly in the new generation, a positive danger to society. Her training had bred in Octavia a rigid conventionality which had become part of her nature; in Henry it had produced an unconventionality just as rigid. The truth is that neither the Duke nor his sister was of a really flexible nature. They tended toward settling into ruts.

As for Molly, she would have been much more herself eating a bun out of a paper bag. So, probably, would they all, had they been willing to try it. The desire in humanity for picnicking is simply a revolt against our self-imposed rules of living. Nobody really likes having his soul standardized.

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Molly's first impression was that her knives, forks, and spoons were as the sand of the seashore, incalculable. Their mere number and brilliance demoralized her. She saw that it would become a question of watching Gerald, who was on her left, and endeavoring to give an imitation that would deceive the rest.

To-night's conversation was a little difficult. Henry's incredible announcement before dinner was still uppermost in everybody's mind. Even the indomitable tight-rope walker was a little subdued by the general atmosphere.

"Well, Henry," said Octavia, with the greatest good-humor, as the meal drew to a close and Molly began to feel a sense of profound relief, "I suppose the moment has come when we ought to drink to the success of your expedition."

"It is very kind of you, Octavia," he replied, "especially as you are convinced that it is a wild-goose chase."

"Well," she laughed, "if you must chase geese, I suppose you get more enjoyment out of a wild one."

The remark was double-edged, and Molly felt Octavia's eyes on her, though she did not understand the allusion to herself in the retort. Henry, however, missed nothing of it.

"It is the spirit of adventure," he said. "So many of us are afraid of the wild things."

"Surely not of geese, Henry?" murmured Lady Blake.

"In this case," said the Professor, who was a

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little obtuse as far as conversation was concerned, "in this case the goose is a toad."

"Of pure gold," said Henry quickly.

"It sounds," murmured Molly timidly, "like a fairy toad."

"It is," rejoined her husband, "but my sister doesn't believe in fairies."

"Well, who does?" said Gerald.

"Uncle Henry does, and I do," answered Mary firmly.

"Of course we do," said the Duke, "if only because we can't see them."

"I guess," said Miss Ellis slowly, "the fairies quit this planet some time back. Things move too fast for them nowadays."

"People will go through life wearing goggles," Mary murmured, almost to herself. "Don't you think, mother," she said aloud, turning toward Octavia, "that we ought to drink the health of the bride? This is a sort of wedding breakfast, you know."

"Of course," said Octavia without enthusiasm.

They all rose to the toast and Molly, whose imitation of Gerald's methods had up to now proved faultless, rose also, still trusting that what he did was right.

Thus, without any conception of the enormity of her behavior, the Duchess of Wynnninghame proceeded to drink her own health.

As they sat down again the Duke stole a look at his sister. She was leaning across the table, murmuring the necessary and conventional words which fol-

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low the toasting of a bride. But Henry had known her far too long to be deceived. In her eyes he saw what was not so much a light of disgust at Molly's mistake as of triumph at the realization of her forebodings. And for the first time in his life the Duke realized that his sister was a snob. He started vaguely trying to classify her as he would one of his reptiles. She was an emotional snob. It is a form of barrenness which is found most often with intellectual bankruptcy. Lady Blake could always be relied upon to do the right thing. Had Molly started to drink out of her finger bowl, her hostess would have been the first to put her lips to her own. She would never make anyone feel uncomfortable or embarrassed, as Henry, lurching his way through life, was continually doing. Indeed, Octavia was a machine of breeding and education, absolutely perfected. But her snobbishness lay in the fact that these things—the fish knives, the finger bowls, and all the rest of it—really mattered to her.

Her emotions had become questions of like and dislike—not love and hate. Perhaps, mused Henry, the change had happened in her childhood. Or was it possible that some people were born only with a capacity for distaste and approval? That was why, he decided, one could not hate Octavia, although she was hateful; to all intents and purposes she was not there.

She had opened the book of life, become intensely interested in the number of its chapters, and had never read a word. She might just as well be buried.

. . . Well, she would be, one day.

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He decided at once that he himself would be cremated. Then Henry pulled himself together, and realized that this was neither the time nor the place for soliloquy.

Lady Blake had risen and Perrin was holding the door open as the ladies retired to the drawing-room. Later, in three cars, they were to motor down to the landing stage for the dance on the yacht. Molly, with Octavia chatting affably into her ear, was convinced that she was a success.

Left alone at the table, the three male members of the party remained for some moments in silence. Gerald felt unaccountably awkward, while at the same time he pondered, not without wonder, on the trick of fate which had secured for his uninspired uncle such a beautiful Duchess. The Professor was engaged with the immediate future. What was Octavia going to do about the dance? He remembered with cold horror Henry's remark about the evening papers. The Duke was thinking of nothing at all. He cracked his nuts and drank his port, conscious of a vague feeling of triumph. He felt much as an amateur who, buying a picture on trust from an obscure dealer, discovers, on its arrival, that he has had a lucky accident and that the forebodings of his friends are not to be realized.

Gerald rose suddenly. All at once it had appeared to him that he was not wanted.

"Excuse me, Uncle Henry," he said, "I want to see about my gloves."

The Duke nodded carelessly as the boy went out. Peter looked up as the door shut.

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"Henry," he said, "you told me once that if ever you did anything grotesque, I was to remember that somewhere behind that lay your theory of living. Is there some . . . some creed behind this marriage?"

The Duke put down his glass. He cracked and excavated another nut before replying.

"There is an ideal behind it, Peter," he said, "as there should be behind every marriage."

"But not," asked the Professor, "the ordinarily accepted ideal?"

"What is that?" asked the Duke.

"Love," replied his friend; "or, at least, companionship."

Henry was silent. When he spoke it was to be irrelevant.

"What do you think of my wife, Peter?" he asked.

"She is very beautiful," he answered; "very beautiful indeed."

The Duke nodded.

"Expert opinion," he said, "is always desirable. You, of course, Peter, are a connoisseur; you can tell whether she is only 'chic' or whether she has 'flair' as well. You can tell whether she is fast or slow, vicious or good-tempered. There is something, after all, in graduating for life in Continental cafés."

He smiled at Peter over his coffee, and the Professor smiled back. He recognized the raillery under the words, and he knew that the Duke was trying to lead him away into the paths of small talk.

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But Peter was puzzled and serious. He had no intention of being side-tracked in this way.

"I know nothing of your wife, Henry," he said, "except that you should not have married her. You see, I am relying on your granting me the privileges of a very old friend."

"They are yours, Peter," said the Duke, "but I am afraid I cannot gratify your curiosity. My marriage is one of the many things in the universe which even a scientist must take for granted."

"At least answer one question. You do not love her?"

"If you will tell me what love is, I will answer you."

The Professor pushed back his chair.

"If you do not know, I am already answered," he said.

"Peter," said the Duke slowly, "you and I are very old friends; in many ways very deep friends. But we have never ploughed up each other's natures to see what sort of soil lies underneath. There are some friends who can do that; but it is very risky. We know each other's lives, you and I, but of each other's souls we know nothing; it would be fatal to try to discover one another so late in the day. But this much I will tell you. I have a creed according to which I have tried to live my life. That creed, like all that are anything more than pose, has now become a crusade. My standard is a banner—lily-white, without device. My motto, 'Simplicity.' I want to lead a simple life. I want my conscience to ask simple questions and my actions to answer them

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simply. I want to contrive to do without the amazing superstructure which civilization has built up about us—cults and rules and problems which we create merely to waste time over. Life is not a question of how much one can get into it, but how much one can push out of it. Our churches endeavor to occupy God, whereas it is my belief that God has produced plenty to occupy us, but we have made such a labyrinth of our lives that we have no time for Him.” He drained his glass and wiped his lips. “That is all I am going to tell you, Peter,” he said, “and somewhere behind all that you will find the reason for my marriage. You have my permission to look for it.”

The Professor made a gesture of disgust.

“Your creed can be summed up in one word, Henry,” he said. “Laziness.”

The Duke smiled at him, and for a long time Peter said nothing. He gazed into the bottom of his glass at the little ruby circle that reflected the electric lights. So, in his marriage, as in everything else, Henry had been introspective. The Professor had a mental picture of Molly, full of vitality, alive, the slave of no monastic shibboleth, ready to enjoy the riches of the world—its jewels, its pleasures—above all, its passions and its love. And Henry saw none of it. Yet he had never suspected him of being among the Pharisees. He looked up suddenly and stared at the Duke as he lay back in his chair with that look of grave contentment which had so often irritated his friend when they had been engaged in some scientific controversy. “My God!” he

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thought. "The man is the very apotheosis of the Prig."

He suddenly flung a question across the table.

"And what about her?" he asked.

The Duke looked puzzled. A look of distress came into his eyes.

"Her?" he echoed.

"Yes," said Peter. "Your simple life is so simple that it reduces everything to the figure one. What about her?"

He rose and went out; a feeling of intense annoyance came over him. It was incredible—such selfishness. Yet Peter had never thought of anyone else but himself throughout his life. But that is the way of folk.

The Duke sat still in his chair, a troubled look in his gray eyes.

"What about her? What about her?"

Suddenly the stem of his wine glass snapped between his fingers. He sat quite still. After all, Peter had been the first to deal a serious blow at the crusade for the lily-white banner. Was it a pose, after all? "What about her?"

He suddenly realized that he had been thrusting aside this question from the very first. Yet he supposed that she was happy. Why not? He did not trouble to consider whether happiness was a negative or a positive proposition.

And yet he could not feel satisfied. Supposing she was not happy? Well, what more could he do? At least he had not deceived her. He had never

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pretended to be in love. In love? Why on earth did people demand of a man that he should inevitably produce a certain set of emotions at a certain age? He drifted off into an absurd analysis of Love which left it with about the same status as malignant influenza. Then he rose and lighted another cigar. After all, he thought, perhaps he was a prig. Perhaps he was in the habit of putting a reserve price on his own virtues—so high that they became unmarketable—hothouse blooms. He knew now, at any rate, that he deliberately wished only to matter to himself—that he had always wished it so. Peter, whom he had often found himself despising, could not be said to be a really bad man, merely an amiable ordinary sinner—and he was very human, he radiated much farther. . . .

This girl, then, whom he had married—he had attached no meaning to her at all. He had smiled indulgently when she had told him that she loved him. He remembered that his smile was the same and his feelings the same when Mary had complained of the fever of measles. It was a “You’ll-be-better-soon” smile. Now he saw that Molly was not merely a collection of curious clothes hung on to something. She was definitely in opposition to him. She was determined that he should matter to someone else besides himself. She, too, was fighting a crusade. Its end was that they should matter to each other. It struck Henry with sudden and violent force that his life had suddenly changed. In his usual introspective way he cast back for a precedent to his feelings. He found it suddenly. It was

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when he left the nursery for the first time and went to a preparatory school.

He remembered that it had been most unpleasant.

But any further reflections which the Duke might have been inclined to make were cut short by the entrance of his wife. Molly had thought of nothing else since dinner than her husband's verdict on her behavior. Now she came straight up to him with characteristic simplicity and said:

"Did I get through it all right?"

"Perfectly," answered Henry mechanically.

"It isn't any use for me to ask you questions," said Molly firmly, "if you are going to answer them like that."

"Well, what do you want me to say?"

"I want you to tell me what I did wrong, of course."

The Duke smiled.

"My dear child, what does it matter?" he said. "What on earth can be the importance of a set of arbitrary rules for eating? Short of making unpleasant sucking noises with one's soup, the whole bag of tricks is manifestly of no account."

"I dare say," said Molly, "if you live alone. If you don't, you must eat like the next person."

"Why?" asked Henry.

"Why? Because, of course, you must."

"A woman's reason."

"You don't want a reason for a thing like that."

"On the contrary," returned the Duke, "there should be reason in everything."

"Oh, well," said Molly, "if you really want rea-

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sons, I suppose it is that it's such a little thing that it isn't worth being different about; at home we used to throw salt over our shoulders when we spilt any. I don't know which one originally believed in it, but it wasn't worth while upsetting 'em by not doing it, was it? Same with the knives and forks an' things. If everybody did it their own way, it might do. But if only one does, nobody knows which way to look. I know as much as that, anyway. 'Tisn't that they're ashamed of you, it's because they're sorry you're unhappy 'cause you don't know the rules."

"So that when it sends him to prison, Society is not ashamed of the burglar, but of the system?"

"Oh, what do I know about burglars and Society?" said Molly a little impatiently. "I want you to tell me things."

"What things?" he asked.

She hesitated for a moment and he noted the restless movement of her fingers.

"Well," she began slowly, "I . . . I've a dreadful feeling there's too much of me showing; I've never done it before, and I suppose you get used to it. But I want to know whether there was more bare of me than of anyone else. You see, I haven't got anyone else I can ask," she added, in quick apology.

"You can be perfectly certain," answered Henry gravely, "that any frock of Mary's will be exactly as low or as high as the latest decree of the gentlemen in Paris who manage these absurdities allows."

"I'm glad it's all right," said Molly with a sigh. "But why do you think everything is absurd?"

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"Well, are not most things?"

"I don't know. I never think about them," she answered, "but I remember once I went to an exhibition where there were queer looking-glasses that made people all shapes, and there was a very solemn man behind me who said, 'If we were all like that, straight-backed men would be ugly.' I couldn't think what he meant—but I did later. If everybody agreed with you, this frock would be absurd; as nobody does, it isn't."

This was exactly what had happened at his preparatory school, thought the Duke. He was being forced to detach himself from his . . . well, yes, it seemed more than ever like a pose.

"Lilliput and Brobdingnag," he laughed. "I didn't know you thought so much. It isn't fashionable."

"Nor am I," she returned. "That is why I must be taught how. If only Lady Blake——"

Suddenly a great rage surged up in Henry.

"There is nothing Octavia can teach you," he said sternly; "nothing at all."

"But there is—lots," she answered, looking up at him sharply.

He stretched his arms a little wearily. It had started as a brilliant and quixotic romance, this marriage of his. Was it rapidly becoming a commonplace misalliance where relatives with a sense of duty were laboriously to teach the bride her new tricks?

"Why can't you go on believing in your silly books?" he said suddenly.

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"One day," she said with a quaint shyness, "I hope I shall."

And he realized with a sense of impotent irritation that that future date was tied up with the incubation period of the pestilent disease, Love.

"It's a shame to bother you," she said, quickly divining his embarrassment, "but I came here because I may not have another opportunity of being alone with you; I want to know—what are you going to do with me?"

"Do with you?"

"Yes. What do you want me to do when you've gone? I . . . I can't go home again, you know."

"Your allowance——"

"Oh, hell!" she cut in distractedly. "That's not what I'm thinking about." She recollected herself suddenly. "Sorry!" she said. "I oughtn't to have said that."

"Why not?" said the Duke. "You meant it."

"My allowance is more'n I'll ever spend. What I want to know is, where'll I go? What'll I do? How'll I learn to be a lady?"

"I don't want you to learn to be anything. If you do, you will make yourself a dustbin for other people's foibles—that is all."

"But when you come back?"

"You can chew your table-napkin for all I care."

His egoism reared itself before her like a vast wall. That so kind a man could be so obtuse!

"But," she said, "it is I that want to behave properly."

"It is a case," he said, "where the will is the

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deed." He saw suddenly a dreadful vision of Molly as an automatic doll with the jerky utterance and mechanical gestures of Eliza Doolittle. It appalled him. Molly, for her part, saw that she did not interest him in the least. The frock, the hair . . . all had counted for nothing. She was merely a problem. He would solve her to his own satisfaction and go happily on his way. She was to be left behind to build a fool's paradise for herself out of cheap novels. She saw the enormity of his charity when she realized that this was all he imagined she was worth.

And she had thought she was to be allowed to make him happy . . . at least, to try. Now she was only to be solved.

"I'll write to Padwick, my solicitor, about you," he was saying. "He will fix you up wherever you want to stay. Of course, you have got to be very comfortable and happy."

Oh, of course! Had he the remotest idea of what happiness was? She said nothing. She had thought he would have realized that this was the last time she would see him for six months, that she would want to know what he wanted her to do, that perhaps he might feel a little sorry for her. Apparently he felt no emotion of any kind—she might be a puzzling feature in one of his reptiles. She remembered that she had never seen him display any feeling over anything. He stood now, his eyes fixed dreamily on a point of the wall just above the clock. His thick hair was a little untidy, his lips a little curved. She could see that his thoughts were

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far away—in the South Seas, perhaps. Why did she love him? Not for his ascetic, self-centred personality—it was all too cold. Not even for his kindness, for dimly she began to perceive that that too sprang from a certain disgust, a shrinking from the unpleasant things of life. Yet love him she did, and that as much as ever before, when the glamor of her dream-monger blinded her to the impenetrability of the man himself. And suddenly, though only in part, she realized that it was something behind those gray eyes that appealed to her, something that had never come out into the light of day, perhaps because there had never yet been anyone strong enough to drag it forth. All at once she felt the desires of the pioneer—she would be the one to explore the depths of those steady eyes—she would never give up—she would be indefatigable. Somehow, she thought suddenly of the only time she had ever been to the seaside. A man had been almost drowned, and they had spent four hours trying to bring the life back into his body; toiling until the succorers themselves were well nigh spent. But the man had lived. Then she remembered how lonely that half-dead victim of the sea had looked, everyone save he pulsing with life and movement and endeavor. He had been a thing apart—alone. She stole another look at the man standing by her side, and with a start realized that he was lonely, too.

And her intuition was right, for Henry was—and had always been—a very lonely man. He had never realized that mortals were as dependent upon each other's souls as upon each other's bodies. He had

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seen only the barrenness of the life into which he had been born, and he was trying to live by bread alone. His soul was starving because he had inherited the whole world and none of Heaven. He had not been so foolish as to accept the world as a substitute, but he had not been wise enough to find a heaven for himself, and though he had told her that there was nothing on the earth like good dreams, he had never been able to make realities of his own. So he hung poised between earth and sky, touching neither, a waif, ignorant of his own beggarden, a waif who was gradually giving up even the tearful ecstasy of crying for the moon.

But Molly, being one of God's real babies who hung on to a star with her hands and dabbled her feet delightedly in the gutter at the same time, saw only that he stood alone, and did not give herself the trouble of asking why. Now, other people's loneliness is sometimes the open sesame to a woman's heart, and Molly, who had already given the whole of hers to her dream-monger, discovered all of a sudden a little piece which had been overlooked, and sympathy and tears and hope for him welled up in her all at once, so that she suddenly tiptoed and kissed him longingly, lingeringly, on the lips; a kiss that was the raising of the standard of her crusade, which had nothing to do with a creed or a formula, a circumstance for which, it may be, it was a thousandfold more strong.

As for Henry, he patted her cheek good-naturedly and did not realize that he had become an object of pity.

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Anyway, the net result of all this tangled psychology was that Molly decided that he was lonely, and Henry himself became the object of a cure; so that both husband and wife now had their own private crusade, and to Molly, at any rate, the ambition to make him "love her like hell" was renewed a thousandfold.

After this, the first spontaneous kiss that she had ever given him, Molly felt a fervent desire to get out of the room before he said anything to spoil the moment. She gave a little laugh, half nervous, half triumphant, and stepped out of the door before Henry realized that she was gone. When he was alone he shrugged his shoulders suddenly, for all the world like a dog shaking water from its back, and then threw the end of his cigar into the fireplace. It was time, he thought, to go down to the yacht. What a nuisance the dance was! How ridiculously the world took its pleasures!

His mind was exclusively engaged on thoughts reptilian as he drove down to the landing-stage alone, for Henry never waited for anyone, any more than he expected anyone to wait for him. His thoughts were still in the South Seas as he climbed up to the chart-house of the "Cobra," after returning the salute of Captain Phillips, the skipper, and sat down, with a feeling of splendid isolation, in a corner of the little room. His hand stretched out idly and picked up a book which lay beside him. Captain Phillips was a family man, and his wife and children had but just left the yacht after saying good-by to him. This book had been a parting gift

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to one of his children, and had been left behind by mistake. Henry looked dreamily at its cover and read the title: "Fairy Tales for Little Folk." In five minutes the Duke of Wynnninghame was completely immersed in it.

Meanwhile, Molly, still marvelling a little at her new-born courage, had gone upstairs determined to ask Mary to lend her something in the nature of a cloak to wear on the way down to the yacht. As she passed the door of her own room she decided to go in and see whether her appearance was still completely undamaged. She was adding those finishing touches to an already completed toilet, to which, it appears, there is no end, when she suddenly heard the key turn in the door.

In a moment she was across the room, trying the handle. She was locked in. Down the passage she heard footsteps. She knew at once that they belonged to Octavia. In a moment she realized that Lady Blake was determined she should not go to the dance. She stood absolutely still for a moment. She had not been such a success, then, at dinner, after all. A fury of rage welled up in her. She wanted to scream, bring everyone to her door, and insist upon being released. But this, she realized, would only prove conclusively that she could not behave—that she had no dignity.

She crossed and sat down on the bed. She was not to see him again, then. By the time the door was open Henry would be far away on the high seas, and she—she would be left to fight a long battle with Octavia and Octavia's entourage. She shivered

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a little and looked out of the window. It was dark now, and far away the illuminated decks of the yacht twinkled like a little constellation on the water. Well, she must not let him down. She must be dignified. She drew down the blind, for somehow those little twinkling lights seemed rather like a bad joke. So she wasn't to have her chance to show Henry that she could hold her head high in the Society that surrounded him. And there was something else that this action of Octavia's showed. After Henry was gone, the war was to go on. Undoubtedly Lady Blake would try to get rid of her. Could she do it? Molly knew little of the law or its power. Perhaps Henry might miss her and send for her from the yacht. But no—Octavia would tell him she had been afraid to come. Afraid! She clenched her fists in a paroxysm of rage.

Suddenly she caught sight of herself again in the great pier-glass. For some moments she gazed at her own reflection. It seemed to comfort her not a little. After all, she was not entirely unarmed.

Above all, she must not disgrace him. . . .

In the hall Peter was struggling into a big fur coat.

"Where is Uncle Henry?" asked Mary, at the foot of the stairs, rosy with anticipations.

"It appears," said the Professor panting, "that he has gone on alone."

"How like him!" laughed the girl, and then in answer to a call from Gerald, who was already seated with his cosmopolitan in the second car, she hurried down the steps into the night.

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Peter was to go down alone with Octavia. She appeared now, majestically gowned, and eyed the Professor for a few moments.

"Have you everything on board for the voyage?" she asked suddenly.

"Why, of course," returned Peter. "The last of the packages went down yesterday."

"I only asked," added Octavia, "because it would be a pity if you had to put back for anything."

He understood and said nothing.

"By the way," she went on smoothly, "the Duchess has a headache and will not be able to attend the dance."

The Professor looked up quickly.

"She seemed quite well at dinner," he hazarded.

"Perhaps she ate too much," said Octavia, buttoning her glove.

Peter looked her full in the face, but she did not waver.

"Octavia," he said at last, "is it fair?"

As you remember, he was the most susceptible man in the house. Octavia returned his look unflinchingly.

"The question is, Peter," she said, "is it necessary?"

For a moment their eyes held each other, then the Professor's dropped. He felt vaguely for his best friend, his large silk handkerchief.

"If we don't hurry, Peter," said Octavia, in level tones, "we shall be late."

He held the door open for her.

CHAPTER XVII

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

THE scene on the yacht was one of those which Society journalists love to describe as brilliant but which are in reality a trifle dull. Everybody looked very expensive, but nobody very expressive. Somehow, it was the kind of assembly that one instinctively reckons up in cash value rather than on any other basis. But it was a genuine aristocracy, for their cash was on their backs rather than in their banks.

Meanwhile, they were experiencing the immense and unlooked-for relief of having something to talk about. The triumph of the evening came to him or to her who discovered someone who had not read an evening paper. Octavia had made no remark about the marriage, and in the circumstances no one cared to broach the subject with her. As for the Duke himself, he had not put in an appearance at all, which was causing Octavia not a little uneasiness and the guests a topic of endless speculation.

Mr. Pardoe-Vine endeavored for some time to buttonhole Peter with the intention of forcing the truth out of him and being the first to make an official statement. But as the Professor, who hated the old gentleman more than anyone of his acquaintance, because they had exactly the same bad habits,

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avoided him like the plague the whole evening, the unfortunate bachelor was bound to remain among the speculators.

He was talking to Lord Hartbloom, who, shaking his head reproachfully, remarked that "marriages of that kind were not fair to the Peerage." Lord Hartbloom's grandfather had been raised to the dignity of a hereditary legislator at a stiff price, which he had been able to pay as a result of Government contracts during the Napoleonic wars. In order to establish a family tradition, it was said that none of the Hartblooms had been allowed to laugh aloud since the Reform Act.

Neither Gerald nor Mary would have thought of volunteering any kind of information on a family matter such as Henry's marriage, without receiving first official instructions from Octavia. But with the arrival of the Countess of Edgeware, some statement was bound to be made.

The Countess was an old lady of seventy. One of her many grievances was that she was Henry's godmother. Although long past the period when she should have settled down into a dignified old age, Lady Edgeware had never abandoned her efforts to cheat time of ten years by wearing a mask of pomade and enamel. The result was that she looked like a gargoyle. She had divorced her first husband because he insisted upon walking round Berkeley Square in his dressing gown. Her second husband, the Earl of Edgeware, was an old gentleman whose bones had become too stiff for the hunting field, and who was therefore only interested in the next world,

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where there was the odd chance that he might become a supernatural M.F.H. Heaven without horses it was beyond his power to conceive. As for Lady Edgeware, she was well known as the most inveterate marriage broker in London. She had made several attempts upon Henry's life, and her lack of success had caused her to look upon his ultimate marriage as the crowning glory of her activities. The announcement of his wedding, therefore, which had been maliciously read to her by her husband, she felt not only as a social disaster of the first magnitude, but also as a personal slight to herself.

As she bore down on the spot where Lord Hartbloom was still holding forth on the obligations of caste he happened to catch sight of her out of the corner of his eye, and with a muttered apology dived incontinently down the companion-way toward the saloon. Mr. Pardoe-Vine, slower of initiative, was caught and immediately buttonholed.

"What!" said the Countess. "Are you here?"

The old gentleman smiled wanly.

"Yes," he replied. "'I go everywhere and do nothing.' Was it the Duke of Wellington who said that, or someone else?"

"I'm sure I don't know," returned the old lady. "You are one of our club men," she said in a thrilling whisper. "What is everybody saying?"

Mr. Pardoe-Vine had no intention of being drawn into a discussion of his host's marriage. He was loyal, if he was critical.

"What does everyone always say, Lady Edgeware?" he said airily. "As usual, the young people

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are talking seriously about Death, and the old are talking enthusiastically about Life."

Lady Edgeware rapped impatiently on the rail with her fan. Then she shook her finger at the old gentleman so that it exploded in a series of rheumatic reports.

"That's not what I want to know at all," she said. "I want to know what people are saying about Henry's marriage."

"Oh, that!" returned Mr. Pardoe-Vine. "Charming—quite charming!" And murmuring that it was high time they presented themselves before Lady Blake, he adroitly steered the baffled Countess to the companion-way and down into the saloon.

Meanwhile, Octavia had escaped for a few moments from her duties as hostess, and, by this time thoroughly uneasy at the non-appearance of the Duke, and connecting it vaguely in her mind with some hitch in her efforts to circumvent the Duchess, had sent for Dunn, and discovering from him that he knew nothing of the whereabouts of his master, had ordered him to search the most unlikely places in the ship, and if the Duke failed to materialize, to return to Wynninghame Towers and find out what had happened to him.

"Peter," she said to the Professor, "I shall only feel quite happy when you and Henry are among the cannibals."

"But it is a desert island," he protested.

"All the better," retorted Lady Blake. "If there was Society of any sort, Henry would be certain to get into trouble."

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At this moment the Countess appeared with Mr. Pardoe-Vine as escort, and Lady Octavia realized that the moment had come when she was to be forced to make a statement of some kind.

Mr. Pardoe-Vine, after delivering up his burden, disappeared as quickly as good manners allowed in the direction of the supper-room. Peter wandered out on deck again, where the strains of the orchestra drew him like a magnet—and so, since all introductions and arrivals had now been dealt with, Lady Blake and the Countess were left alone.

"Yes," Octavia was saying, "the marriage is, of course, quite impossible."

"Lady Blake," snapped the Countess, "it is an absolute catastrophe."

"Worse mistakes have been corrected," returned Octavia calmly; "it is all the easier because Henry is not in the least in love with her."

"What!" cried Lady Edgeware. "Why, his only possible plea is infatuation. Henry has always been the same. As a boy, he never had any excuse for anything." She began to talk at a great pace. . . .

Away from the dancing, where two deck chairs nestled together under the rail, Gerald and the object of his grand passion were sitting out together. The tight-rope walker was leaning over the rail admiring, with the professional appreciation of one who had seen nearly all the beauties of the world, the reflection of the ship's lanterns in the dancing waters and the soothing sound of the lap-lap against the yacht's sides.

"Ohé!" she sighed at last, stretching out voluptu-

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ous arms in a gesture of weariness. She had played a big fish and lost it at the last moment through no fault of her own. Well, there were other fish in the sea, and there was still some bait left, though her looking-glass warned her that it would be wise to confine the sport to the young. Experience is a shrewd detective. "Ohé!" she sighed again, as she looked across the waters and knew that she must become a rolling stone once more. Yet she was not really sorry; four walls had never been able to contain her for long at a time, and she aimed a great deal higher than a merely nice young man.

"Ohé!" she murmured for the third time, so that Gerald removed the cigarette from his mouth and asked her what was the matter.

"Nitski on the wedding, boy Gerald," said Miss Ellis sadly.

"Whatever do you mean?" he asked.

"Don't you see, boysie? Yesterday twopence colored, to-day a penny plain—*ça se voit*."

"You mean you're turning me down?"

She dropped her cigarette over the side and watched the glow suddenly eclipsed.

"Your uncle," she murmured slowly, "is so very casual; he might have a son."

"Of course," murmured the boy bitterly. "I never thought of that." As for his sarcasm, it was as effective as a pea-shooter on an india-rubber ball.

"Somebody," returned the tight-rope walker, unruffled, "somebody has got to think about these things."

"You never cared for me a bit, then?" said Gerald.

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It is a sore blow to a young man's pride to discover that his face value is not what he thought it. But Belle Ellis was not an entirely callous individual.

"You don't understand, boysie," she said. "I like you well enough; just as much as I'll ever like any man, whether I marry him or not. Only, you see, I've got to make a splash. I can't help it. If I'm not hunting big game, I'm not there. I'm a sort of female company promoter. Say, you and I know too much about the world to go breaking our hearts, eh? I'm thinking it would take an almighty eruption even to get a bend on mine."

Appealed to as a man of the world, Gerald quickly started to adapt himself to the new situation. At any rate, he had had an adventure. He found that his mind was sufficiently composed to enable him to light another cigarette.

"Good Lord!" he said, as he flung the match over the side. "We men do get had." There was a certain amount of glory to be extracted even from getting "had."

"It's a quaint thing," said the tight-rope walker, looking over the water. "I'll go off this yacht to-night, and it's a tiara to a hairpin you won't ever clap eyes on me again; but if that girl with the rose-bud mouth and the blush hadn't doped uncle with wet kisses, we'd have been in the same loose-box till we got our contracts for the Better Land."

"Oh," said Gerald, "I might have found you out before then!"

She looked at him with an almost maternal smile, thinking of other "cases" she had handled.

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"You?" she echoed. "You wouldn't have had any more chance than a snowball in hell. Care for another dance?"

But even Gerald was not quick-change artist enough for this.

"I think not," he said stiffly.

"Allowing a decent interval for mourning?" she laughed. "Ah, Gerald boy, don't waste time curing a heartache that's not there. Life's too short to wear black for one's mistakes. Hear that waltz? I danced to that last with a ring-master in Belgrade. It's pulling me. So long!"

Gerald sat out for two dances, fighting against an inexplicable sense of relief. It is annoying to find that one's grand passion is not so grand as one had thought, but it is still more annoying to have to tell one's mother that one has made a fool of one's self.

He was beginning on his fourth cigarette when Mary, who had already danced herself into a state of fatigue, and who had refused everybody this number in order to go and romance to herself in some quiet corner, came upon her brother frowning bravely across the water.

"Why, Gerald," she said, "what is the matter?"

Gerald removed his cigarette slowly.

"Life's a sham, kid," he replied with dignity.

"The world is a hollow farce."

She laughed merrily.

"Oh, not to-night," she answered. "Can't you see the stars shining in the waves?"

He got up gloomily.

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"You think everything is romantic," he said; "just like a kid—always pretending."

"Well, if one must pretend," she answered shrewdly, "it is better to pretend one is happy than pretend one is miserable."

"Words!" scoffed her brother. "You live on them."

"Don't be cynical, Gerald," she begged. "No disaster can be great enough to excuse that."

"If you want to know," he said slowly, "I am no longer engaged."

Mary was silent for a moment. She could not pretend to any sorrow.

"Oh!" went on the boy, "I didn't expect you to be sympathetic. You were one of the first to throw mud at Belle."

"Some of it seems to have found a home," she answered. "Of course, she did not want you after Uncle Henry's marriage. I can't pretend I'm not very glad to hear it."

"Oh, well," answered Gerald, "I'm not going to make a tragedy out of it!"

"I believe," said his sister, "that even you recognize that it is a case for a *Te Deum*."

He looked at her with surprise. Mary apparently wasn't quite so dense as he had liked to think her. She seemed to have divined that inexplicable relief of his. It was disconcerting, and he did not immediately meet her eyes.

"Well," he said at last, looking away over the water, "well, at any rate, don't tell mother; I may have been an ass, but I'm hanged if I'm going to

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stand months of 'I told you so.' I'm going to tell her my own way."

"Come and have a dance with me," she answered, and they moved off toward the strains of the orchestra.

"I say," said Gerald, as they threaded their way past ghostly ventilators and phantom davits, "what about the Duchess? Old Henry seems to have struck a winner, though she did drink her own health. You know, Mary, you can't be a real woman, or you'd have been almost crazy at her taking the shine out of you in your own clothes—what?"

"Don't be silly, Gerald," she returned. "She'd have taken the shine out of me if she'd been dressed in a sack. There's a difference between being pretty and being beautiful, you know."

"Very few pretty women," he said, "would acknowledge it."

"They would look infinitely less pretty," she retorted, "if they did not."

"Where is she?" put in Gerald suddenly. "I haven't seen her since dinner, or Uncle Henry either."

"The Duchess," said Mary in a detached sort of way, "has too bad a headache to come to the dance."

Gerald looked at her sharply.

"By George!" he said. "That will be mother's finger in the pie!"

They came upon the dancers, a splendid picture of iridescent color and high-pitch happiness, its brilliance redoubled by the background of the night and the sea.

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Mary stopped suddenly.

"It's a shame!" she said tensely. "A shame!"

Gerald was startled by the anger in her voice; he was about to answer, but the next moment she had flung herself into the dance and he was forgetting everything in the intoxication of rhythm. For though the accomplishments of her soul were many, Mary had not neglected her body, and she was an excellent dancer.

CHAPTER XVIII

CINDERELLA

THE valet discovered Henry at last digesting with great appreciation the story of Cinderella. The Duke looked up as Dunn came into the chart-house and put the book aside with a sigh.

"I beg your pardon, your Grace," began the valet, "but Lady Blake sent me to express the hope that you have not forgotten that you are giving a dance."

"Very wrong of me," murmured Henry.

"I was also to say, your Grace, that the Duchess has a headache and is too unwell to come to the yacht."

"Ah!" said the Duke, looking out of the little square window. "Now that sounds very improbable." He remained silent for a few moments figuring out to himself why Molly should suddenly have developed a headache. Perhaps she had been afraid to face the ordeal; perhaps Octavia . . .

Now, interference with his concerns always annoyed Henry more than anything else.

He turned suddenly to the valet.

"Have you ever read 'Cinderella,' Dunn?" he asked.

"Certainly, your Grace."

"A very pretty story."

"Very pretty and charming indeed, your Grace."

"Curious that I should never have actually read the story until to-night," went on the Duke. "I

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suppose such abysmal ignorance is really only tolerable on the Bench. Now I wonder what was wrong with Cinderella?"

Dunn perceived that a comment was expected.

"Nowadays, your Grace," he said, "all she wanted would be a little swank."

"I am afraid you are very worldly," murmured Henry, rising; "but you are probably right."

He ran his finger idly over the pages of fairy tales.

"Go back to Wynninghame Towers, Dunn," he said at last, "and see if her Grace is sufficiently recovered to attend the dance."

"Very good, your Grace."

"On the way tell Lady Blake that I am just about to make my appearance in the saloon."

"Very good, your Grace."

Dunn turned and went down the ladder. Henry, after a few moments' reflection, became more than ever convinced that Octavia had manufactured this sudden headache. He suddenly remembered, too, the paragraphs in the evening papers, and realized that in all probability he would be expected to make some sort of statement.

The realization annoyed him considerably. He remembered also that Lady Edgeware would be sure to be in evidence somewhere, and he began to wish very earnestly that it was to-morrow. He, too, began to think that he was only safe upon the high seas. However, there was nothing for it, and so he descended the steps and entered the saloon, which was quite empty save for Mr. Pardoe-Vine, who was thoughtfully smoking a cigar and drinking cognac.

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"Well, Wynninghame," began the old gentleman, "I hear you've made a fool of yourself again."

"So they say," replied Henry.

"I always knew," said Mr. Pardoe-Vine, sipping his brandy, "that you would end with some kind of midsummer madness of this sort; always told your father you would. Now it's happened, and you're finished. What does Octavia say?"

"Exactly what one would expect Octavia to say," said the Duke. "Nothing of any importance."

"Don't be bitter!" snapped the old gentleman. "I always said to your father, 'The boy's mooning about. He ought to be getting into trouble—it's all wrong. He'll grow up bitter!'"

"How glad you must be," said Henry, as he moved toward the door, "that you are no relation of mine!"

"H'm!" grunted the apostle of the roaring forties. "In my young days people used to say what they thought."

"What an indictment of the Victorians!" murmured Henry. He went out to where the dancing was in full swing and gazed upon the scene for some moments. The measure came to an end, and for some time Henry was meeting old acquaintances and endeavoring to remember the names of new ones. Someone, bolder than the rest, congratulated him upon his marriage and, the lead once given, everybody followed suit.

It was not till some time later that he was run to earth by Lady Edgeware, who steered him firmly to a secluded corner and flung herself forthwith into a searching cross-examination. Henry bore it all

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good-naturedly enough, but his lack of serious attention to her drove the old lady nearly crazy with irritation. "No one," she wound up, "will ever receive your wife."

"In that case," said Henry, "seeing that the whole of my existence has been an effort to escape being received, she will be an excellent helpmate to me."

"You are a fool, Henry," snapped the Countess; "an utter fool."

"Leave it at that," he returned. "Can the leopard change his spots?"

"He can take the advice of his relations," she answered.

"But then," returned Henry, "you will find that all a leopard's relations have private spots of their own, so it becomes a choice of evils."

"That a man of your age should be fooled by a pretty face!" she ejaculated. "It is almost incredible."

"Yet, you married the Earl late in life, Lady Helen," he said.

"Do you suggest that I fooled him with my face?"

"How did you fool him, then?" he asked. "Apparently you regard all marriages as some sort of swindle."

Lady Edgeware was annoyed.

"Your marriage and mine, Henry, have nothing in common. Yours is an entirely one-sided contract."

The Duke rose.

"Do you know," he said, "not very long ago I

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was impertinent enough to believe that myself? Now, however, I am not nearly so sure."

The old lady stared at him.

"Do you mean to tell me," she said, "that you are not in love with the girl?"

"You must see her, Lady Helen, and judge for yourself."

"I refuse to meet her. I will have nothing to do with such a marriage."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"A pity!" he said. "I think my wife would have been interested to see my grandmother. Still—of course, you must do as you think best. Shall you cease sending me invitations for your second Thursday afternoons?"

"You are an incorrigible and absurd idiot," shrilled the Countess, losing control of her temper. "I have a great mind never to speak to you again. You have created an impossible situation, and you do not even give it serious thought. It is maddening."

It was at this moment that the Earl of Edgeware, moving stiffly with the aid of an ebony stick with a magnificent handle of ivory, in the form of a crouching lion with jade-green eyes, appeared in the circle of light formed by the arc-lamp above them.

"Evening, Henry," he said in a dry voice. "Helen congratulating you on the wedding? Very sudden. Very sudden indeed; you never could do things like other people, could you? Take a steep jump, blindfold, into a canal as likely as not; I've seen 'em do it. Damn lugubrious temperament!

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Well, we all have our eccentricities, don't we? I'd like to see your temptation, Henry; I'm interested to see what sort of woman you think you'll run in double harness with. Something out of the ordinary, if I know you. One of these things you see about with cropped hair, eh? Or a reclaimed sister of mercy, eh?" He chuckled to himself merrily till, happening to catch sight of Lady Edgeware's eye fixed upon him in stern disapproval, he ceased suddenly, and his short and rare burst of cheerfulness died immediately.

"Henry's marriage, Edward," she began, "is not a matter to be flippant about."

"Certainly not, Helen," mumbled the Earl; "certainly not. Can't imagine what I was thinking about."

"It will be quite impossible for us to receive his wife," went on the Countess; "quite impossible."

"Oh, come, my dear," remonstrated her husband, whose kindly nature was revolted by this attitude, "you know, things aren't what they were. Look at Cartley's wife—goes everywhere—everywhere! Nobody minds. Must be catholic, you know. Must keep up to date!"

Henry leaned against the rail and watched the two old people. Really he found it impossible to be angry with them. It was a revelation to him to see how the most private of his affairs were treated as pooled among his friends and relations.

"Cartley's wife," the Countess was saying, "was an entirely different case. At least he was married properly, whereas Henry——"

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"Hole-and-corner business," said the Earl, shaking a trembling finger in Henry's face. "Hole-and-corner business."

"Well," said the Duke, "surely anything was better than an argument with Lady Helen and Octavia at the church door?"

"If the affair had been conducted openly," said Lady Edgeware stiffly, "you would never have got as far as the church door."

"In that case," answered Henry imperturbably, "mine was the only way."

"I shall not receive the girl," repeated the Countess obstinately.

"Come, Helen," said her husband; "must keep abreast of the times, you know. Folk ride other people's indiscretions on a light rein nowadays. When we were young we rode hard and broke knees as often as not. Can't be done now; old folk must fall in with new ways; need not agree, but must acquiesce—Parliamentary phraseology, but sound—sound."

"If you wish, Edward," she retorted, "to fly in the face of my wishes——"

"Greatest mistake, my dear," returned her husband hastily. "I only thought perhaps we'd better think it all out first. Don't want to be left jibbing at the post while the rest of our set are making the running—eh?"

The Countess rose.

"I'm going to speak to Octavia," she said. "At least it is providential that the girl had enough good sense not to make an exhibition of herself here to-night."

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She moved off toward the dance.

"Sorry about this, Henry," said the old Earl "Deuced sorry. My wife, you know—blue blood—breeding and all that—but never can behave like a lady—never could—never will. But charming nature—charming, if one were ever to get to know her. I feel sure of it. As for you, I'm with you, Henry—sympathize entirely. Follow your head. I've seen a scratch mare leave a thoroughbred ten lengths in five furlongs before now. You can't tell—you can't tell. But Octavia and Helen are the old school, you know. Break things if they won't bend, and all that. Had its points, but we live in a more facile generation, eh? Liberty, Equality, and Eccentricity, what? Must keep young!"

He chuckled to himself and hobbled off in the direction in which the Countess had disappeared. The unfortunate old gentleman spent his whole time following her about and pouring oil upon the troubled waters that always seethed and bubbled in her wake.

Henry stood looking over the water for some time. He wondered whether Lady Edgeware really meant to cut his wife, and, if so, what sort of attitude he himself ought to adopt. It appeared that in his efforts to bring to life the wonderful happiness of Molly's silly books he had only succeeded in giving her a husband who did not know his duties, a home that she regarded as a museum, and a title which was about the heaviest liability she had ever incurred. The Duke began to feel serious doubts as to the progress of his campaign. It seemed possible that he

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was to be taken out of his depth. He would have to practise swimming.

A little dancing light appeared suddenly on the black curtain into which Henry was peering. It pirouetted and leaped capriciously to and fro like a countryman on a moving staircase. Henry realized suddenly that this was the boat returning from the landing-stage. He wondered whether Molly had made up her mind to come, and, if so, what would take place when he presented her to his guests. She appeared to him then a somewhat pathetic little figure. For the first time he felt that it was part of his business to protect her.

There was something rather comic in the way these two pitied one another.

The boat drew nearer and the dancing light now showed the dark figure of a man rowing, in the bows the unmistakable rigidity of the valet, and in the stern another figure quite overwhelmed by furs and rugs, with a white face peeping out from the top and eyes that scanned the decks of the yacht with a frightened curiosity.

The boat came alongside, and Henry stepped to the head of the gangway and leaned far over the side. She looked up at him from the boat.

"Hullo, Cinderella!" he called down to her.

Her voice floated up to him, a new note of happiness in it. Had not her husband actually remembered her existence?

"Hullo, Prince Charming!" she said.

CHAPTER XIX

COLLISION

MOLLY came up the accommodation ladder two steps at a time.

"Headache better?" he asked, as he lent her his hand.

She looked at him with a slight smile. So that was the story Octavia had told.

"Oh, yes—quite well," she answered; "but I got locked into my room and couldn't get out. Dunn broke the lock in the end."

"Ah!" said Henry. But it did not express the rage which he felt. He was at any rate progressing toward a realization of the married state, for he was already beginning to look upon Molly as his property. It annoyed him intensely that Octavia should secrete his personal belongings.

"Well, now you are here, you will dance with me?" he asked.

"Do you dance?" she said in surprise.

"I hate it," he admitted.

Molly laughed.

"We won't risk it," she said without affectation. "You hate it, and I'm not at all sure I know how to do it. You know all that knee-bending and waggling looks awful difficult."

"Positively idiotic it looks to me," answered her husband.

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She looked at him in silence.

"Oh! I do wish you weren't going away!" she said. "And I hope you'll find the toad," she added hastily.

Henry made no answer. He wished fervently that his wife did not love him—a wish that is not so uncommon as it sounds. Life is so much easier when one is indifferent.

"I shall be back within six months," he said at last, "and then we must make our plans for the future."

She slipped her hand suddenly into his.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't mean to say that about your going away. I don't want to bother you with my love—until—until you want me to. It isn't fair of me. And I owe you so much."

"That," he returned, "is quite absurd." A week ago he would not have meant it.

"Listen!" she said suddenly. "It's the last time we'll be alone for months. If you are only being kind to me—if you are certain you can never be anything else, I'd like you to say so. I sort of feel, in a cottage I—I could work things—but this way it isn't any good. I want you to tell me the truth. If I'm in the way, I'm far too fond of you to—to go on. And I'll just slip back into the boat, and you need never see me again. I won't do anything silly, but . . . but I'll make it easy for you to get rid of me."

It cost her something to say it, but it was what she had wanted him to know since she had first come down to Wynninghame Towers.

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"As for love," he answered, "there is no time-table on the subject, is there? And for the rest, you are my wife, my child, and I am afraid you must stick to me, however unsatisfactory you may find me."

She sighed. As usual, he had skated delicately over the thin ice when she had so wanted him to fall in.

"I wish I knew," she said, "why you married me."

"I told you," he returned, "it was in order that you might have scope for your dreams—and play with the toys in my nursery."

"Perhaps," she answered in a low voice, picking nervously at the fur round her shoulders, "perhaps your toys won't work for me; I don't think you quite understood what a simple little fool I was. Those books were really very silly books, you know. Perhaps your toys are beyond me."

"Really," said the Duke, "I don't think we've given them a fair trial yet."

She stood up suddenly.

"I'm a hell of a brute to worry you like this," she said. "Sorry! I suppose the band makes me sloppy. You'll positively hate me soon."

"Let us go down and watch people enjoying themselves," said Henry. "It is always a perpetual marvel to me."

"Another absurdity!" she laughed as they moved off toward the dancing. "I shall really begin to believe you are a prig if you are so superior."

He felt her hand close on his arm as they came into the blaze of light.

"Oh!" she said, as she saw the glittering kaleido-

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scope of dancers. "Oh! I am afraid—afraid of them!"

"It is only their envy you have to fear," whispered the Duke. But good manners never quite healed any hurt. Even Henry was beginning to despise his politeness to his wife.

Octavia sighted them from afar and realized that she was called upon to make the best of a bad business. Of this, as of everything else which was a question of suavity rather than sincerity, she had the technique at her fingers' ends. Nevertheless, she was not quite sure how the Duchess of Wynnninghame would receive her after being locked in her bedroom for the greater part of the evening.

She came up to Molly with a smile of welcome on her face, and, greeting her in a voice loud enough to be heard within the immediate vicinity, told her how pleased she was that she had been able to come down to the yacht after all.

"And is your headache really better?" she finished up, ignoring the rather ominous frown on Henry's face.

"Much better, thank you," said Molly, and Octavia gave a sigh of relief. At any rate, the girl was intelligent enough not to make a scene. She went on talking quickly, however, for she knew that Henry, once he was genuinely irritated, was capable of any outrage.

"I dare say," she went on, "that you would rather not dance, in case it were to come on again?"

"That is extremely unlikely," put in the Duke dryly.

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"It is quite well, thank you," said Molly, "but I won't dance, all the same. I'd like just to listen to the band."

Good, thought Octavia; that, at any rate, eliminated the cake-walk. It appeared there was yet a chance of coming through the evening without disaster. At any rate the plunge must be taken. Old Mr. Pardoe-Vine, who was beginning to think of leaving the yacht, as nothing of any interest for future retailing in clubs seemed to be going to happen, caught sight of Octavia and came up in order to make his excuses.

Octavia plunged.

"May I introduce Mr. Pardoe-Vine?" she said to Molly. "He is a very old friend of the family, and has been so anxious to meet you. This is the Duchess of Wynninghame," she added as the old man bowed.

"I am very pleased," he said, "to meet Henry's wife. I knew his father before he was married; I was present at his wedding. I am only sorry that I was not present at yours."

Molly took his outstretched hand, and thought what a nice old gentleman he was; while in Henry's head there were buzzing the words, "Well, Wynninghame, I hear you've made a fool of yourself again." What a game it all was! And what a silly game!

"I trust you are going to be very happy," the old man was saying. "I am glad to be the first of Henry's friends to congratulate you both together."

Henry once more found himself repeating, "Well,

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Wynninghame, I hear you've made a fool of yourself again!"

Molly was thanking him for his good wishes. The Duke felt that in a few moments he would be repeating his line aloud.

"Come, Molly," he said, "everyone will be going soon, and there are other congratulations for us to receive."

They left Octavia and the old gentleman alone.

"What a nice old man!" said the Duchess. "I didn't feel a bit afraid of him."

"Charming," returned Henry; "but he has one fault. He knows the rule of the game too well. It becomes monotonous."

Meanwhile, Mr. Pardoe-Vine gazed after them.

"Do you mean to tell me," he said, "that Henry is not in love with that girl?"

Octavia sighed. It appeared that Lady Edgeware had not been able to hold her tongue for very long.

"No. Not a scrap!" she said in answer to his question.

The old gentleman's eyes were still fixed on the disappearing figure of the Duchess.

"The man must be a fish," he snapped suddenly.

"Curious you should say that," returned Octavia.

"It is just what Peter Graine calls him."

"But why on earth did he marry her, then?"

"That," she answered, "is one of the questions I am tired of not being able to answer. Really, I think sometimes he must have done it in one of his fits of absentmindedness."

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The old man grunted in an irritated way.

"No man," he grumbled, "has any right to be as inexplicable as Henry."

Still, he had seen the Duchess, and at least a fortnight's club conversation was provided for. He said good night, wrapped himself up in an enormous coat and a white silk scarf, and returned to town, sleeping happily all the way and dreaming of a reception in which a Duke dropped his aitches and a Duchess swore like a fishwife.

Society found the process of being introduced to Molly a little difficult. The stereotyped phraseology designed for weddings does not exactly fill the bill when the ceremony has taken place behind everyone's back and filled two columns of the half-penny press as "A Shop-girl's Romance." Lord Hartbloom had rather cruelly suggested that the right thing to say on such an occasion was "And the next thing, please?" Molly was aware that all these people to whom Henry was introducing her must have read her "romance," and the knowledge made her more self-conscious than she might otherwise have been. She shook hands and smiled, therefore, just a little too mechanically.

Society was baffled. It upset the rules of the game that the Duke should be departing for the South Seas immediately after his marriage. There was a time for everything, and this was emphatically not the time for the South Seas. Society was a little annoyed at having its code so deliberately infringed. However, there was no doubt that the new Duchess was highly ornamental, and, this being so, Society

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was prepared to exercise to the full its functions of faith, hope, and charity.

It was the suspicion of this last in its behavior which annoyed Henry considerably. He did not like any kind of criticism of his belongings. As for Molly, she never noticed it at all.

It was Gerald who took her down to the supper-room and plied her with delicacies she had never before seen outside a shop, and it was Gerald who, now completely recovered from having his grand passion returned on his hands, went out of his way to be merry and amusing, partly because he wanted Belle Ellis to see him and partly because he really was enjoying himself. A pretty girl is a pretty girl, even if she is one's aunt. Thus Molly was beginning to find her feet.

Henry, seeing her in safe hands, determined to have a word with Octavia before his departure. The yacht was to start that night, in order to catch the tide, and the Duke had no intention of allowing Octavia to go home without knowing exactly what he thought of her conduct.

"Yes, Henry," she said crisply, before he had spoken a word, "I locked her in her bedroom. I considered the risk of her coming here was too great; I conceive it as part of my duty to see that you are not made a fool of."

"It didn't strike you, I suppose," returned Henry, "that it is apt to make a man look a considerable fool if his wife is locked up in her room by his sister?"

"A choice of wits," she answered.

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"My affairs," he said angrily, "are my affairs."

"No, Henry, they are not," replied Octavia. "That is a mistake you have made all your life."

"Do you propose to meddle with my wife while I am away?" he asked.

"I have told you," she answered; "you have pitted yourself against me in this marriage. I was brought up to believe in caste, and your title is too old to play the fool with."

Henry could not help but admire the hard lines of pride in her face. At least Octavia was sincere in this. She really did believe in that thing she called "caste."

He even thought he could trace some emotion in her voice as she went on.

"I wish," she was saying, "that anyone but you had succeeded to the title. It is not that you have ever before disgraced it, though it is never wise for a gentleman to be eccentric. A man with a lesser name might be accused of advertisement. But you, Henry, are indifferent to your title. You do not consider, apparently, that you owe anything to the memories of those who made the name of Wynninghame and kept it. A real aristocracy is a society of debtors—all trying to pay. It is that which lifts them from the ruck who have no obligations. But you have never cared, Henry, and now there is this final insult to us all, this inexplicable marriage to a shop-girl, without even the dignity of passion about it. Do you wonder I have tried to prevent you from flinging the girl at the head of Society to-night?"

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"I am sorry, Octavia," he replied. "I am afraid I can see no importance in a name. I suppose I was born without the capacity for being blue-blooded, but at the same time I have inherited from someone or other a certain obstinacy in matters connected with myself and my belongings. You seem to take for granted that I am not in love with my wife——"

"I know a lover when I see one," broke in Octavia. He shrugged his shoulders.

"At least you will admit that she belongs to me," he said.

"It appears to me in a different light; I look upon you as belonging to the family," she answered.

"Well, Octavia," said Henry slowly, "as you are determined that it is your duty to annoy me, I suppose I must accept the situation. Short of murdering the girl, you cannot get rid of her without my consent and her connivance."

"No," said Octavia, whose faith in the right lawyer, however, was so great that she fancied that all these little difficulties could be surmounted.

"In case you annoy her I shall instruct Padwick to look after her interests."

Octavia laughed.

"You talk, Henry," she said, "as if you thought I proposed to send her offensive postcards."

"Well, really," he replied, "I begin to think that you would not stop at anything."

She laughed again.

"At any rate," she said, "we know where we stand. I cannot guess why you married that girl, but it is enough for me that the coat-of-arms on your dishes

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will mean nothing to her at all. That disqualifies her in my eyes, you see."

"I wonder," mused Henry, "whether you will ever see that you are as inexplicable as I am."

"Certainly not," she returned. "Who has ever been known to call me eccentric? By the way, Henry," she went on, "Gerald is no longer engaged to that creature."

"You worked that, did you?" murmured the Duke, not without a note of admiration in his voice.

"No," returned Octavia; "you did."

"I?" he ejaculated.

"Certainly; she came to the conclusion that you might have a son and heir. And then, you see, Gerald would not be Duke of Wynnninghame; naturally, I knew directly you were married that she would finish with Gerald. That is why I didn't bother any more about them."

Henry digested this in silence.

"She cannot have been at all a nice woman, after all," he said at last.

"She wanted to become a Duchess," said Octavia, as she moved away. "She was not the only one."

But to Henry, whose illusions were even more in number than his relations suspected, it appeared a particularly shameful and dishonorable affair.

Meanwhile, the Fates, grinning impartially at Octavia and Henry alike, were pulling strings.

In the first place, Molly was beginning to enjoy herself. Gerald had persuaded her that champagne is not a sin except when it is bad champagne, and although she had resolutely declined to have more

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than one glass, it had already done its kindly office and taken off the edge of her nervousness.

The second pawn in the game which the Three Sisters were playing was the blundering diplomacy of the Earl of Edgeware. The old gentleman, who was as honest as the day and quite unfit to be Lady Edgeware's husband, had learned that the Duchess of Wynnninghame was on board the yacht and was filled with alarm lest his wife should carry out her threat and refuse to receive her. Now the Countess, had she been left to herself, would in all probability have received Henry's wife coldly but correctly. But naturally it was out of the question to follow that course when her husband had the impertinence to advise it. Lady Helen was one of those women who believed it necessary, in order to insure a happy home, to ignore everything her husband said and blame everything he did. Thus, when the old man hobbled up to her, looking very serious and obviously having something very much on his mind, she settled down immediately into her most obstinate vein.

"I say, m'dear," began the Earl in jerks, for he was very much out of breath. "They say that Henry's wife is on board. Most awkward, you know—after what's passed. Must do the right thing, of course. Big jump, I know, but we don't want to come down over it, eh?"

"If you want to talk about horses, Edward," said his wife, "talk about horses; if you want to talk about Henry's wife, talk about her."

"Yes, Helen," he acquiesced. "Can't get out of the habit, y'know. You're quite right. Devilish

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bad form, like riding over hounds and all that. But the question is, what are we going to do about it, eh?"

"I have already said that I will not receive her. If Henry chooses to insult us all like this, he must put up with the consequences."

"But, you know, Helen," the unfortunate old gentleman protested, "that's rather a drastic line to take, what? We don't want to make fools of ourselves."

"Have you ever known me make a fool of myself, Edward?" she asked.

The Earl of Edgeware, who had a most unreasonable aversion from telling a deliberate lie, shuffled awkwardly on his feet.

"Well, my dear," he said at last, "there's no harm in taking a little forethought about these things, eh? Question seems to me, what's everybody else's line of country? Follow the field and you can't go wrong, you know, what?"

"Are we talking about horses or not?" snapped the Countess.

"No, Helen, certainly not. Very forgetful of me." He sat down with difficulty by her side.

"But, you see," went on the kindly old man, "there is another side to the question. The girl is in a very difficult position—very tricky mount, eh?—got to ride strictly on the snaffle. Question is, do we want to put more difficulties in her way? Seems to me a bit ungenerous—not the sporting thing to do, what?"

"I am not looking at the affair from the point of view of sport," returned his wife dryly.

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The Earl blundered deeper and deeper into the pit.

"Well, my dear," he said, "I am only giving my opinion for what it is worth."

"If only you knew, Edward," she replied, "the true worth of your opinions, you would be ashamed of making presents of them to anyone. Now, please, let us have no more of this foolish arguing. I have told you the line that I am going to take, and that is the end of it."

The old gentleman sat silent for some moments; then he sighed heavily.

"Well, Helen," he said at last, "all I can say is, it doesn't seem to me the right line of country at all."

The Countess gave him no answer, and her husband comforted himself with the reflection that he had done his best. In reality, of course, he had done his worst. Good intentions are as often quicksands as paving-stones.

Henry had found Molly enjoying herself immensely in the centre of an infatuated crowd of young men. She had never before had the opportunity of tasting the triumphs of her own beauty. Indeed, she had only realized the potentialities of her face and figure for the first time under the tuition of Mary's maid. In her Bermondsey home she had always been given to understand that loveliness and godliness could never go hand in hand, and although, of course, she knew that she was not ugly, it had never occurred to her that she was a beauty.

Now, therefore, she had come suddenly into her

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own, and the result was that she found herself undergoing a complete transformation.

Her old life and her old associations slipped away from her faster and faster every moment. A sense of power is the finest cure in the world for shyness, and the obvious admiration of the boys who surrounded her, and deemed it a privilege to do her any little service, gave Molly just the sense of power that she needed to throw off the last of her chrysalis of self-distrust. So Henry found her laughing and talking gayly, interlarding her remarks quite freely with "Oh, hell, no!" or "Crikes, yes!" without a trace of the abasement and apologies which followed these slips when she was talking to her husband. The young men found this peculiarity charming, of course, and Henry, coming into the room, saw that she was enjoying herself immensely, and, not altogether sorry to find her entertainment taken off his hands, retired on deck again, and was immediately grabbed by Lord Hartbloom, who pressed him gloomily for his views on the Parliament Act and the ultimate fate of Hereditary Legislation. The Duke, of course, had no views on the subject at all, which was just what Lord Hartbloom desired, for it made the road clear for his favorite monologue on the efficiency and necessity of Government by Caste.

Octavia came into the saloon just in time to hear a ripple of laughter and an unmistakable "Hell!" from Molly. It appeared to her immediately that the Duchess of Wynnninghame would have to be kept under strict surveillance for the rest of the evening.

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Accordingly, very much against Molly's will, she extracted her from the centre of her admiring audience and bore her away, determined to run no more risks from her undisciplined vocabulary. The young men marvelled for some minutes on the strange alliance between the "old crank" whom they knew as the Duke of Wynninghame and this "bubby" girl, until one of their number summed up the position by ejaculating, with real feeling, "What a waste of good material!"

But Molly had for the second time "tasted blood," as the Earl of Edgeware would infallibly have put it, and she was very little subdued even in the company of Lady Octavia, who steered her skilfully away from the younger members of the party on deck and seemed determined not to lose her for a moment.

Afar off she sighted the Countess and her husband, and, having no knowledge of the Earl's fatal diplomacy, Lady Blake thought it would be no bad thing to allow the old lady to make the acquaintance of the girl whom, in her husband's absence, they considered it their duty to dethrone altogether.

"I want to introduce you to Henry's godmother," she said, as they approached the melancholy couple sitting by the ship's rail.

"I'd love to," answered Molly, determined to make as many new friends as possible in the exhilaration of her newly discovered powers of attraction.

The Earl rose at their approach.

"Sit down, Edward," said Helen sharply.

"No, m'dear," returned the old gentleman in a

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loud whisper. "I will not sit down. I insist on behaving myself."

"Sit down," she repeated severely.

But he ignored her. His wife's attitude appeared to him "unsporting," and according to his ideas that was the last word on the subject. Toward this storm Octavia steered her bark in blissful ignorance.

"I want to introduce you," she began, "to Henry's wife——" But she got no farther. The Countess stared at Molly for a moment, then deliberately rose and turned to her husband.

"I think, Edward," she said, "it is time that we were returning."

The old Earl was obviously very distressed.

"We are delighted——" he began haltingly, but Lady Helen cut him short.

"I think not, Edward," she said icily.

Lady Octavia was utterly bewildered. She could hardly believe her ears. For the first time in her life her tongue refused to come to her aid. She stood staring foolishly first at the Countess and then at her husband, who was fidgeting miserably with the handle of his stick. Out of the corner of her eye she noticed Henry and a small collection of friends standing near by, equally thunderstruck.

The Duke was coming forward to the protection of his wife, but Molly herself forestalled him. It had taken her a few moments to realize what had happened. Now the full knowledge that the Countess had refused to receive her struck her like the lash of a whip. A few hours ago she would probably have been covered with shame and burst into

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tears. But now it was different. During the last hour she had learned to put more confidence in herself. The insult brought a flush of anger to her cheeks. She looked at the old woman and saw with the unerring disgust of healthy youth the hideous painted face with its unseemly conflict between the red of the cheeks and the age in the eyes. It appeared to her a monstrous thing that she should not be considered fit to shake hands with this travesty of an old woman. She had never seen before an example of the world-old struggle to make youth work overtime, for in Bermondsey they have neither the means nor the leisure for trying to conceal the honorable scars of age. Thus the horror and the ugliness of it struck her with a force which the others, brought up to regard such things as regrettable eccentricities, were quite unable to realize.

She lost sight of her surroundings, and saw only the cold stare of her antagonist with its grotesque assumption that she was something too insignificant to recognize. Her mind leaped back in one bound to the days when she played in mean streets, and when blow was met by blow.

"Not good enough, aren't I?" she cried, her eyes blazing. "You're a hell of a fine lady, aren't you? I'm dirt—that's what I am! Crikes! I don't have to paint my face to make it look like one, anyway!"

She stopped, out of breath.

Suddenly she caught sight of Octavia staring at her from the rail. She became conscious of the enormity of her words. The cold, crisp utterance

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of the Countess fell upon her ears in a sort of fearful monotone.

"Perhaps, Edward," she was saying, "you will take me downstairs. This is not a very pleasant scene."

They seemed to disappear out of her vision. Instead, she saw her husband's face, his eyes meeting Octavia's, a slight frown on his forehead.

It was all over, then, and she had disgraced him, after all, utterly and publicly disgraced him.

It seemed miles and miles away that the orchestra was playing "God Save the King." She turned out of the little circle of light and ran blindly into the darkness. Lady Octavia braced herself suddenly and shivered a little.

"The dance is over, Henry," she said, trying to make her voice natural. "People will be wishing to say good-by to you."

She noticed suddenly that the Duke's face looked very white.

"Damn the guests!" he said. "I am going to my wife."

CHAPTER XX

"YOU LITTLE FOOL!"

HENRY disappeared in the direction in which Molly had fled. Though he was more angry than he would ever have imagined it possible for him to be, it was because the Duchess of Wynnninghame had been insulted, and not because Molly had suffered hurt. Thus he was not altogether without the pride which Octavia accused him of lacking. He wished to find his wife in order that they two might stand at the head of the accommodation ladder and bid god-speed to the departing guests, together able to ignore the bad manners of the Countess.

But he did not find her. Instead, he ran right into Belle Ellis, who was just about to leave the yacht and was looking for her hostess, quite indifferent to the rather dubious position which was now hers as regarded Gerald's mother. For the tight-rope walker, like all those who live very fast and under no rules, had discovered long since that it is quite possible to leap through life from stepping-stone to stepping-stone without bothering about little accidents *en route*, for if by chance one should get a wetting at a long-distance jump, does not the damp quickly dry? Thus, when she met the Duke, she stopped and held out her hand gayly.

"I'm off!" she said without preamble. "Don't suppose you'll ever see me again, so I'll say 'So long!' I like you, you know. You're fresh." She hesitated a moment. "I'll give you a straight tip,"

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she said. “Don’t trust that rosebud Duchess of yours. She’s caught you, I know. Take the word of a woman who’s walked the high wire at one-night stands and walked Mayfair drawing-rooms, too. I know ’em. The innocent, clinging kind. Large, trustful, baby eyes she has, hasn’t she? They don’t miss much, those sort of eyes.”

She laughed merrily.

“Why, I used to work that innocent stunt myself,” she said, “when I was a bit younger. You see, I’m like the conjurer showing how he does the trick. Nice of me, isn’t it? But, as I say, I like you. Now, don’t go and get moth-eaten about it. I’m only telling you for your own good—see?”

Never in his life had Henry come across a thing like this.

“Good-by, Miss Ellis,” he said stiffly. “As for my wife, I prefer to trust to my own judgment.” He passed on quickly. She looked after him and shook her head.

“Mulish!” she murmured. “Well, it’s his sort that gives me a chance. Turns up the pages of the marriage service before he knows his A B C. Ohé! Well, I warned him; I’ve done my best for the old guy!” She looked up at the masthead light whimsically.

“Say, have you got that down for me, Mr. Recording Angel?” she said; whereupon she slipped quietly out of the story and went on her way, to play other big fish in other waters, and gamble desperately, with the little lines appearing on her shapely neck. But she was not without her influence on Henry’s

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thoughts. Octavia had told him at once that he had fallen into the trap which had been laid for Gerald. Lady Helen, too, had apparently taken it for granted. The wisdom of a cosmopolitan dipper into the world's lucky-bags had not even considered any alternative as possible. And they were all women, who presumably knew their own sex.

Henry was not seriously disturbed, but it was a fact that the first enthusiasm of his crusade had been rather overwhelmed by the rush of events which had followed its inception.

He pursued the quest of his wife, but she was nowhere to be found, and he came to the conclusion that she must have left the yacht by one of the numerous boats which had been requisitioned for the convenience of his guests. But, as a matter of fact, she had done nothing of the kind. When she had turned and fled, after the disaster which even now she could hardly realize had occurred, her one thought had been to hide herself. As on the occasion when she first noticed the fluttering newspaper placards that had lowered her marriage to the indignity of a cheap romance, she felt the whole world staring at her with curious and pitying eyes. She had run, blindly at first, out of the light, and had finally found a dark corner where the weird shadows of a high-swung lifeboat drew a kindly curtain over her, as she stood clutching the rail and staring with tragic eyes out to sea. At one time her husband actually passed her, and she heard his quick, angry steps disappearing along the deck. But she had nothing to say to him—now. Lady Octavia was right in her prophecy.

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She had disgraced him. It was only left for her to get out of his life as quickly and as quietly as possible. How he must hate her!

She thought of all that had happened since yesterday. Her hopes and fears at Wynnninghame Towers, the triumph of Mary's frock, the thrill she had had on looking in the glass and realizing for the first time her own loveliness, the admiration of the boys on the yacht and the gradual victory over her own self-distrust—and then the final catastrophe with its overwhelming and irremediable disgrace.

In the space of eight hours she had climbed to the very top of her ladder of life and fallen again to the bottom. She realized for the first time that she was physically and mentally tired out.

She looked back on her life in Bermondsey and remembered with surprise how she used to revel in the “silly books.” How very silly they had been! And it was the influence of these that had led her to believe that her great love for her dream-monger would carry her over every difficulty. The omnipotency of love, then, was only a fiction. It was not able to stand alone, after all.

Now she must leave him—of that she had no doubt. She would no longer dream of cottages in the air. She had lived on Romance, fed on Romance, wedded Romance—well, now she must kneel humbly before the shrine of common sense and ask for a job.

As for her new-found crusade, if Henry was a lonely man, she was certainly not the woman destined to explore the impenetrability of those gray eyes.

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Yet, as she said it, she knew that she was standing by the death-bed of all the beauty and all the joy that life had to offer her. Even had he never grown to love her, she was one of those to whom real passion only comes once, and simply to serve him would bring to her a far greater happiness than the love of any other man could give her. But now she could serve him best by leaving him. And there was the present to face. She had to get off the yacht—alone, if it was possible. She looked down at Mary's frock and longed suddenly to tear it off. It seemed to be laughing at her. It belonged to the life she had shown herself unfit to live. It was not her own, just as the manners, the customs, and the traditions of her surroundings were not her own.

With an effort she tore herself away from these thoughts. She must go. That was all that mattered. Where she was to go, what she was to do, never entered her head except that home now was more impossible than ever. She crept out of her hiding-place and stood still for a moment listening to the murmur of the departing guests at the far end of the yacht.

That was where the boats were—that was where she must go. But she did not move. She could not face them; it was impossible.

And as she stood irresolute, Henry came upon her suddenly out of the shadows, so that there was no time for escape or even to think what she should say to him. Her husband stopped, surprised at seeing her, for he had thought she had left the yacht.

And suddenly it flashed upon Molly that here was

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her opportunity to cut the knot. She had heard of Gerald's fiancée and her candid admission. She would tell him she had only married him for his title, and that she had not thought the job would be as difficult as it had turned out to be after she had taken it on. Thus she would cut right free from him, and he need not be troubled with any pity for her. She gave a nervous little laugh.

“I think this is the finish,” she said, “so I may as well tell you the truth.”

He had been about to answer and tell her that he was not in the least angry with her, but the last half of her sentence cut the words from his lips.

“I thought I could bring it off,” Molly was saying, “but the old lady with the painted face did it in.”

She tried to give an imitation of the inconsequent and unembarrassed manner of the tight-rope walker, and anyone but Henry, whom the sudden suspicion of what she was going to say had left temporarily deaf and blind to other considerations, would have noticed the false tones of her voice.

“As I can't do it I don't want to go on with it,” said Molly slowly. “It doesn't seem worth the bother, after all.”

The Duke found his voice at last.

“Will you please explain to me what you mean?” he asked.

“Isn't it as clear as daylight?” she returned, finding it easier to keep up the rôle now there were two of them in the scene. “You tossed a title in the air for me to catch, and of course I caught it. Why not? We've all got to live, haven't we?”

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"Do you mean," her husband asked, "that my sister has been right—that that Ellis woman has been right about you all the time?"

"Well, of course," Molly forced herself to say.

"And all that about caring for me?"

"Part of the game," she answered bravely. Even if she regretted her sudden impulse, it was too late now.

He was silent for a few moments. So his crusade was suffering its final defeat here in the darkness where the whole thing was being turned, in a few ruthless words, to a mockery, with a commonplace adventuress in the centre of the picture.

"You have been very clever," he said at last.

"Oh, no," she returned; "I've muddled it badly. It is you that have been very foolish."

"Somehow," said Henry slowly, "somehow I have never imagined that I had any pearls to give, or that there were so many swine ready to pick them up. I can't believe it now."

The words cut her to the heart, but she knew that, as he now must see her, they were only her due. She managed to squeeze out another of the tight-rope walker's little laughs.

"Lucky for you," she said, "that I've turned the job up. Doesn't seem to me that there's much in being a Duchess, after all."

This was the girl, thought Henry, whom he had found in the Zoo, longing only for the simple pleasures of two pounds a week and unlimited novelettes.

"And the Zoo and the silly books?" he asked.

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Oh! why had he reminded her of that? The memory of those days when she hugged a real romance to her breast tried her so high that she almost forgot the part she was playing, and for the first time since she had spoken those dreadful words to the Countess the tears fought hard to show the Duke that she was only acting a part. But she mastered them for his sake.

“You see,” she said steadily, “we have to size up people and see what tale’s going to work with them—that game seemed the best to me with your kind—the rest was easy—it was just a chance, if I did the wronged-woman-in-the-snow business, that you’d be foolish enough to marry me.”

“And I was,” said Henry, almost to himself.

“You can get rid of me easily enough,” she went on, fighting hard all the time for the control of her voice. “You said I was clever, but I’m not clever enough for this game. I’ve got to fly a bit lower.”

He said nothing. Had Lady Octavia been present, Molly’s pitiful imitation of an adventuress would not have deceived her for a moment. Indeed, it would only have served to shatter her convictions on the subject. It merely left Henry in a state of complete bewilderment.

As for Molly, meeting the steady gaze of his gray eyes and reading in them half at least of what was there, she felt that she must bring the little drama to an end if she was to play her part through without collapse.

“So, you see,” she said, with a last and valiant effort at unconcern, “I’m a bad lot altogether, and

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it's lucky for you I'm not keen on going on with the Duchess business."

He looked at her for a moment, then suddenly turned his back on her and walked slowly away toward the lighted stern of the yacht. She stood looking after him with a live pain in her eyes. He disappeared, and she realized that she would never see him again. What a "good-by" it had been! Her hands went to her breast, for something seemed tugging at her heart intolerably. Suddenly a voice from behind startled her.

"You little fool!" it said.

She turned and saw Mary Blake, standing by her side, her cloak on, ready to return to Wynninghame Towers.

"You little fool!" repeated Mary. A gentle smile played round the lips of her fresh young face, a grave, kindly smile of wisdom beyond her years, the wisdom of a pure and beautiful nature that knew by instinct the good from the bad and the dross from the gold. The little light on the masthead, still playing the rôle which the tight-rope walker had assigned to it, the rôle of the Recording Angel, twinkled merrily. So Mary, the "dear, sweet girl" whom nobody ever considered seriously for a moment, the baby of Wynninghame Towers, who really only occupied Octavia's mind when it was a question of the new season's fashions, was going to take a hand in the game, armed only with a splendid desire to share her own happiness in life with all her fellows, and the clear vision of nineteen years.

"You little fool!" said Mary.

CHAPTER XXI

THE MADNESS OF MARY

HENRY felt a tap on his arm as he emerged on to the now almost deserted scene of the dance. It was the Earl of Edgeware, who was standing at his side, his fine old face quite drawn with distress.

"My dear Henry," he began, a little stiffly, "I feel I cannot depart without letting you know—without assuring you, that is—what I mean to say is that I feel I owe it to you to express . . . to . . ." Here the old gentleman broke down. "Oh, it was damnable—damnable," he muttered. He gripped his stick till the knuckles of his hands stood out white. "I can't apologize for Helen," he said at last. "You will understand that. There are things a man can't get himself to say—but . . . but I'd like you to know, Henry, I'd like you to know——" He could get no farther. Had he himself been in the wrong his apology would have been an easy matter, for he was a man whose sense of the nobilities of life was conspicuous even among his kind. But this thing he felt to be beyond him. He cleared his throat noisily and rapped his stick upon the deck. "Stiffest jump I ever faced in my life," he said abruptly.

"I quite understand," returned Henry. "I can assure you, Edgeware, that the whole thing is of no consequence whatever."

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The Earl shook hands with the Duke, grateful for the way he had taken the unfortunate affair, but went down the side wondering whether he was quite fit to be a husband, after all.

Only a few of the departing guests had actually witnessed the scene with the Countess, but others had of course heard of what had occurred, and most realized, with that subtle telepathy that pervades mankind where two or three are gathered together, that something had happened to mar the end of the evening. Not that any hint of catastrophe was to be gathered from Octavia's demeanor. On the contrary, she seemed even brighter and more brilliant than usual as she stood at the head of the big accommodation ladder, exchanging farewells with the last of her departing friends and acquaintances and received their assurances that the evening had been simply too delightful for words.

The last of them was finally over the side and only the party from the Towers remained on the yacht.

"Well, Henry," said Octavia, "good-by! I hope you will have a very successful voyage, though I am afraid that in hunting for the golden toad you are only again testing your usual belief in the things that are not."

"Perhaps," replied the Duke. "As for this evening's affair——" he went on, but Octavia cut him short.

"We'll not speak of that, Henry," she said. "I will see Lady Helen later, and it can all be smoothed over."

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"I would never have believed," he returned, "that my godmother could have behaved like that."

"She is getting old," Octavia made answer, "and is losing her grip of things. It is not the first time I have noticed it. All the same——"

But Henry had already drifted away, and her words were lost on the air. The Duke had been hit hard, and now he sat, for a long time, an unlighted cigarette in his mouth and the beginnings of a smoldering fire in his heart.

Molly did not want to hear what Mary had to say. She wished only to get away from the yacht and be alone with her dead. She was tired; she wanted to let it all alone. She felt she was losing control of herself, and she was experiencing the terrifying sensations of the beginning of hysteria. She stared at the younger girl stupidly, and then, with a jerky, inconsequent gesture, turned as if to go away.

But she felt her hands suddenly imprisoned in Mary's grip.

"Cry, you silly little idiot—cry, quick!" she heard her saying sharply. It was the unerring touch of the artist in sympathy. With a great sob Molly set free the imprisoned tears born of the last hour, and, with her head on Mary's breast and her wonderful coiffure tumbling in mad disorder round her face, wept with all the hopeless abandon of one whose sorrows are past mending. As for Mary, she gently pushed back the riotous hair from her patient's eyes, and took no notice of the ruin which Molly's grief was making of her latest frock.

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"Listen!" she said at last. "Try to stop crying now. There isn't much time, and I've got to go. I heard the last words you were saying to Uncle Henry. What have you been telling him?"

"The truth," Molly managed to say between the tears.

Mary raised the tumbled head from her shoulder.

"No," she said; "it wasn't the truth—was it?"

"I want him to believe it," answered Molly. She knew she could not deceive this girl. Mary was silent for a moment.

"I know what is the matter with you," she said. "You love him—don't you?"

"Like hell," said Molly, in complete surrender. She was too tired to fight any more.

"Doesn't he know it?" asked the younger girl.

"He never knew how much," sobbed Molly. "He couldn't know how much. But what's the use? It's all over now—and I've disgraced him."

"It is worse," returned Mary, "to have told him a lie."

"I want him to be quite free of me."

Mary shook her head.

"You love him too much, and you can give him too much for that."

"No, no," said Molly brokenly; "he doesn't want me."

"He doesn't know what he wants," she answered shrewdly. "He never has, all his life; you know that."

Molly shook her head.

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"I've disgraced him," she repeated slowly; "disgraced him."

The siren sounded warningly behind them.

"They all tell me I'm just a silly romantic little kid, you know," said Mary suddenly, "but I can tell you the thing for you to do, all the same." Her heart leaped suddenly at the preposterous idea which had just come into her head.

Molly looked up at her.

"There's nothing to do now," she said.

"There's only one thing," answered Mary. "Go with him! The boat's just going to start. Stick to him like"—she smiled quickly—"like hell!" she added, catching one of Molly's hands in hers.

"Don't you see?" she went on. "What chance have you had of showing him how much he wants you? What's the good of telling him a lie and never seeing him again?"

"But it's impossible," said Molly, staring at her, suddenly dry-eyed.

"Why?" cried the romantic Mary. "Doesn't Uncle Henry always believe in impossible things?"

"He'll send me back!" The bare idea of this incredible adventure made the Duchess give a final clutch at her own elusive Romance.

"If I loved a man," Mary retorted, "I'd risk anything to stick to him."

"But I've told him I'm all wrong; what could I say?"

"Say?" cried Mary. "Tell him to look at you; tell him to sit and watch you; ask him if he ever saw a bad woman with eyes like yours. You needn't say

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anything—you're a silly romantic kid, like me—it's advertised all over you."

The madness of Mary was infectious. This last straw that had appeared on the waters before the drowning votary of Romance was growing bigger and bigger and rounder and rounder, until at last, when, with a quick gesture, she brushed the last of her tears from her eyelashes, it seemed that a life-belt was bobbing up and down before her. But it was mad—mad, she thought. It was the very chapter and verse of the silly books which had proved such broken reeds upon which to lean one's way of life. Yet here was Mary holding her hand and looking eagerly into her face with her clear blue eyes, urging her to commit herself to this most incredible of adventures.

"My crikes!" said the Duchess, her eyes shining.

Without a doubt one of heaven's most splendid gifts to humanity are the follies and irresponsibilities of youth. Yet while we are young we undervalue the joy of our mistakes, and if when older we regard the loss of this capacity for unreasonable behavior a little regretfully, we are bound, even the bachelors and spinsters of us, to a conspiracy of silence for the sake of our paterfamilias friends. To most of us the best time in our lives was when we attained to years of indiscretion.

After all, if wisdom is the knowledge of how to live, one need be no wiser at fifty than at twenty. An ability to count the cost may cause one to miss the heights, while foolish youth may reach the top

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without knowing how he got there. But he has arrived, and it is no use for middle age to shout through a megaphone that he has no right to be where he is.

To the two girls the idea of going to sea as a stowaway in an evening frock appeared romantic but not preposterous. To Molly it seemed the last hope. Her ambition always had been to get Henry alone—Henry without his surroundings. So, she had thought, she might start digging for the treasure that lay behind those blue-gray eyes.

Many, after all, have suffered far more perilous adventures for the sake of the magic words, Buried Treasure; mere gold, too, has been their incentive. The querulous note of the siren broke again into her thoughts.

"But how—how?" she cried suddenly.

"In the boat," returned Mary. "Hide as long as you can. Let them get well out to sea. There'll be less likelihood of his putting back."

She disappeared suddenly, and Molly stood alone for a few moments face to face with the absurd adventure she had undertaken. But Mary was back before she had had time to think much about it. In her hands she held a large slice of iced cake and a dish in which there lay half a trifle.

"It was all I could get," she explained breathlessly, "but it is something."

Molly found herself carried off her feet by the enthusiasm of this child. As she climbed with difficulty into the great lifeboat whose shadow had served as a curtain for her disgrace, a dreadful sound told

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her that Mary's dress had failed to survive the evening's events.

"Oh!" she said. "That's your frock!"

"Yours," returned Mary quickly. "My wedding present," she added with an excited little laugh.

She could now see only the head and shoulders of the Duchess standing out from under the boat's coverings. Molly looked down at her in surprise. She seemed to be much farther up than she had imagined.

"It's mad," she whispered; "perfectly mad! But I don't believe I could get down if I wanted to."

"Do you want to?" She heard Mary's voice come up from the darkness.

"No," she whispered in return.

They discovered that their hands could just touch if Mary tiptoed.

"I must go," she whispered. "I know that you are doing the right thing, though it's like a fairy tale. Don't you feel it's right?"

"Yes," returned Molly bravely, though she knew that when Mary had gone she was going to feel very lonely and frightened indeed.

A faint voice from far down the deck told them that Peter Graine was calling for her. The party from the Towers was about to leave.

Mary clasped one of the Duchess's fingers in the dark.

"Good-by!" she said. "Good luck!"

But Molly found that the words she wanted to say were choked. However the adventure ended,

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she was grateful to this girl who should have been her enemy, but had been her only friend.

A little rustle down there among the ropes and things, and Mary was gone.

A ridiculous pair of children, were they not? Yet the bold spirit that loves to embrace the wild improbabilities of life lay behind this little enterprise, just as it has fathered some of the biggest adventures in the world's history. The goddesses of the Sublime and the Ridiculous are on quite good terms sometimes. At this moment they were kissing one another.

The Professor met Mary as she emerged into the light.

"Why," he said, "what have you been doing?"

"Just wondering," answered Mary, "what I'd do if I loved a man."

"You romantic child!" he said. "You go wandering along, gazing at the stars with your mouth wide open——"

"And sometimes," she finished his sentence for him, "a star falls right into my mouth."

"Peter," whispered Octavia, as they finally went over the side, "I did not see that girl go off . . . I suppose . . ."

"In one of the small boats, Octavia," he returned. "Obviously she would try to escape notice."

"Obviously," answered Octavia coldly. The splash of oars died away in the noise of preparation for the yacht's departure.

The Professor lit a last cigar and wandered along the deck. He inquired for Henry and discovered

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from Dunn that the Duke had already retired to his cabin for the night.

Peter wandered away to look for a chair. It appeared that Henry had really been disturbed at last. He found a seat by the rail under a lifeboat and puffed thoughtfully at his cigar. What a wild and inconsequent week it had been! But the gods had fought on their side. What a wise woman Octavia was! Really, these affairs we are wont to call catastrophes were quite easy to deal with if one kept one's head. One should behave reasonably—like a man of the world. After all, incredible things didn't happen—couldn't happen—anyway, one could always prevent them from happening. . . . She had been such a pretty woman, too. But then, everyone ought to be sensible . . . level-headed. That was at the root of a well-ordered life . . . He could not help feeling sorry for the girl, but fairy tales were demoralizing.

His cigar went out and he struck another match.

Over his head, still as a mouse in the bottom of the lifeboat, the Duchess heard him strike that match and feared to move a muscle. A rhythmic kind of buzz told her that the yacht was standing out to sea. She reached out a hand cautiously toward her larder and plunged it clumsily into the trifle. After a moment's reflection she began silently to lick her hand.

Beneath her the man who did not believe in fairy tales smoked comfortably.

CHAPTER XXII

AN ADVENTURESS IN TROUSERS

AT breakfast the Duke appeared to Peter absolutely unaffected by the events of the preceding night. He spoke with his usual enthusiasm of the chances of discovering the toad, and triumphantly dangling the result in the faces of von Rosen and his companions. He discussed at length the methods to be adopted on reaching the island. He made maps with forks and salt-cellars and seemed to the Professor entirely absorbed in the enterprise. Peter himself made no reference to the Duchess. Octavia had triumphed. Sympathy was unnecessary, exultation out of place. Let things take their very excellent course, thought the Professor, who was looking forward with zest to his change of air after the enervating effects of Paris.

Henry took his pipe away on to the upper deck, arranged a canvas chair, and, sinking into it luxuriously, settled down to resume his life where he had left it a fortnight ago.

It was not so easy.

The Duchess of Wynnninghame was an adventuress; it appeared that in saying that he had dragged the family in the dirt his sister had been right, after all. That alone was a sufficiently disquieting reflection. He supposed vaguely that machinery would be set in motion to undo the knot and return Molly

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to her *status quo*. But that, also, was a most unpleasant business.

Then there was the girl herself.

It was not that Henry missed her, for he could never have been said to have had her companionship, but it was a disturbing thought that she had come into his life and left it, and gone—where?

It didn't matter, of course, but there it was—like a maggot in his brain. He reminded himself that these uncomfortable feelings would vanish in a day or two. Undoubtedly at present he was too near the affairs of yesterday. As for his crusade, it was not really affected one way or another. The subject it had experimented upon had been unworthy—that was all. He woke up suddenly to the fact that it was lunch-time. Really, he was wasting a disgraceful amount of time on an incident that was finished.

He spent the afternoon revising his classification of toads. It was a less interesting document than he had imagined.

As for Peter, he marvelled, even with his intimate knowledge of the man, at Henry's capacity for ignoring disaster.

The Duke's custom, when on board the "Cobra," was to take half an hour's sharp exercise round the boat before tea. Peter's custom was to take no exercise at all. For his purpose, Henry was wont to change into a pair of white running shorts and a blazer. In these he would run round the ship's decks for half an hour without a stop. Nothing was allowed to interfere with this. Thus, at four o'clock the Professor, half asleep in a deck-chair, saw him

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emerge from his room ready for his daily performance.

"Really, Henry," he ejaculated with a yawn, "what energy you have! In this heat, too!"

"*Mens sana*——" began the Duke; but Peter cut him short.

"You!" he ejaculated. "Never mind; don't disturb me."

Henry went down to the accustomed starting-place, where a member of the crew invariably sent him off by a stop-watch so that an accurate half-hour's exercise should be registered.

The Duke started away briskly.

Now Molly had caught a violent cold in the head. It is of no use disguising these things, though it is true that they are entirely unromantic. The processes of nature will not adapt themselves to the vagaries of human imagination, and Nature, finding herself outraged by a girl in an evening frock spending the night in the bottom of a lifeboat, took instant and dire revenge. The Duchess had had the most miserable night she had ever experienced. The motion of the ship had made her feel extremely ill, and the continual patrolling of the watch beneath her had made it impossible even to peep out of her prison.

The night had seemed interminable, for she had been quite unable to sleep, partly because of her mental agitation, partly because of the cold and her uncomfortable quarters. The cake she had eaten; but the trifle, early in the night, while she was trying to attain a more comfortable position, had been

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inconsiderate enough to upset. In the total darkness it had proved quite impossible to mop it up.

Thus toward morning she discovered that practically everything she touched had its quota of trifle. Her frock seemed covered with it, her fingers were sticky, she located a little dump of it in her hair and another in her shoe. Under these conditions Romance becomes putty-colored, and as the first rod of light crept in under her tarpaulin covering Molly added her tears to the mess, from pure discomfort and weariness.

Later, in the half-light which did duty for day in her quarters, she regarded herself with horror and wondered how she could ever have the courage to make her appearance. The inevitable ravages of a night as a stowaway had never occurred to her. Also, as has been said, she found herself with a violent cold in the head.

She stroked her nose gently; it was hot. That meant, she thought, that it was red . . . and shiny. Another tear trickled down her cheek, found a comfortable bed of trifle on her chin, and came to rest.

Oh, for Annie and a looking-glass! She dared not even touch her hair for fear of what she might find.

She raised herself and peeped out under the boat's cover on the side toward the sea. The water was blue and fresh; the sun was making rainbows through the crests of the waves. She experienced the feeling which we all have after a bad night, the feeling of being a disgrace to Nature.

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She had no idea of the time, but judged from the light of the sun that it must be after midday. Greatly daring, she raised the tarpaulin on the ship's side and looked out on to the deck. There was no one in sight. She wriggled a bit farther out of the boat. Suddenly she heard the quick footsteps of a man running. She made a violent effort to draw back, but the folds of the tarpaulin caught her by the shoulders and held her firmly. Henry came in sight on his third round. He was running strongly but unprofessionally, with his head down and his shoulders bowed. Molly held her breath as he approached.

Then, of course, Fate came up behind and kicked her over the precipice.

She sneezed violently.

She made another effort to retire into her fastness, but it was too late, and Henry, stopping, disgusted at this interruption of his exercise, and looking up, saw a sight calculated to make a cat laugh or a clown weep, according as you regard the situation.

The Duchess's head was sticking out from the black tarpaulin, making spasmodic efforts to disappear. Her hair, in hopeless disorder and matted in places with the sticky trifle, tumbled about her head in grotesque and shapeless confusion. Across her cheek lay a great line of black, where her face had encountered some treacherous tar at the bottom of the boat. Her eyes were red with crying and her nose with rheum. She looked down at Henry with

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a frightened stare, still trying vainly to get out of sight.

This ridiculous picture, then, was the result of trying to graft the gospel of the silly books on to the uncompromising circumstances of real life. When one becomes ridiculous one is apt to wonder whether there was ever anything sublime about the affair at all.

Molly sneezed again.

"I can't get down," she said at last.

"How did you get up?" asked the Duke.

"It didn't seem so far in the dark," she returned. She was not going to involve Mary in the consequences of this absurd affair.

The Duke thrust his hands into his blazer pockets.

"You will certainly have pneumonia," he said, "if you are not careful."

"How can I be careful," answered the Duchess tearfully, "when I'm up here and can't get down?"

At that moment Mr. Peters, the second officer, came into sight and stopped, about a dozen yards from the Duke, astonished at the picture before him. Henry turned to him at once.

"This is my wife, Peters," he said. "She can't get down."

The young seaman, though he had been in the employ of the Duke of Wynnninghame for some time, was not inured altogether to the infinite possibilities of his master's peculiar temperament, and he did not respond immediately to the invitation.

"Well, Peters," remarked Henry plaintively,

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"cain't anything be done? It is very uncomfortable for my wife up there."

"Why, of course, your Grace," answered the officer, pulling himself together. "If her Grace will allow me . . ."

With the peculiar ease of long practice he swung himself up to the boat and freed Molly from the obnoxious tarpaulin. The descent, with the aid of Henry from below, was easily accomplished. Then the sailor, diving into the bottom of the boat, retrieved the plate and the glass dish in which Molly's unhappy larder had rested. With these he descended to the deck.

The Duchess looked at her husband anxiously, but apparently ~~it~~ was going to say nothing.

"Please," she murmured to the sailor, who stood awkwardly by, wondering whether he was expected to disappear, "please don't say anything about this."

He touched his hat to her.

"Of course not, your Grace," he answered, and departed below decks.

Henry realized that in certain circumstances it was an advantage to have a wife whose dignity was not above saying what, unfortunately, had to be said. It was lucky for them that Peters was a young man with a very nice sense of honor and an unusual predilection toward minding his own business.

The Duke conducted Molly to his cabin, where she sat herself down on his bunk and prepared to throw herself on his mercy.

"In the light of what you said last night,"

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Henry began, "this requires a certain amount of explanation."

She sneezed violently.

"I must get some other clothes," she said; "I'm dreadfully cold. I'll tell you everything directly I'm warm."

Her coldness seemed at the moment the only thing that mattered.

"But," said the Duke, "we have no clothes."

He produced a large silk dressing-gown from a cupboard.

"This," he said, "has at any rate been called effeminate by Peter."

She took it from him and folded it round her.

"These things I've got on are all damp," she said. "That's what's making me so cold."

"Well," he returned, "you had better have a hot bath; you can get one next door. But that," he added, "is as far as my imagination will carry me."

He showed her the bathroom and went out of the cabin. It was characteristic of the man that he continued his exercise at the point where it had been interrupted.

When Molly saw herself in the glass she almost dissolved into tears. Here she was, sticking to him and making a last effort to make him give her some sort of attention, and the first thing she had done was to show him this hideous picture of herself. She took off her clothes, which she found to be even damper than she had thought, and plunged into the big bath. The hot water sent the blood coursing through her veins and brought back her ebbing

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courage. After all, here she was, on the high seas, with the dream-monger—practically alone. If she could not work the miracle now, she never would. As for getting rid of her, short of throwing her overboard or setting her adrift in an open boat, Henry had got to put up with her. The big sponge which she found on the bath-tray seemed to wash away the memory of last night with every douche that ran down her back. After all, things weren't so bad. Anyway, though it had started badly, she was going to have her chance. There is nothing like a well-filled hot bath for making one regard life from the right angle. She began to kick and splash happily.

But as the water grew cooler, she peeped over the edge of the bath at the crumpled heap that now represented Mary's wedding present and began to wonder what she had better do next.

She could not appear again in that torn and be-trifled frock. Besides, it was too wet. She got out and began drying herself, protracting the operation longer and longer as she began to realize that it was about as far as she was likely to get in her toilet.

She discovered that heaven had its limitations, when she saw the uselessness of praying for a skirt.

However, something had got to be done. She slipped into Henry's dressing-gown and stumbled, tripping over its voluminous folds, into the other room.

Then she dived into the Duke's chest of drawers.

Trousers, in the abstract, are the most uncompromising things in the world. With a man inside

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them they lose something of their innate offensiveness, but held up gingerly toward the light, and regarded as a substitute for petticoats, they appear, however well groomed and creased they may be, as two legs and nothing else. And the feminine mind demands, essentially, something more. So Molly put down Henry's gray flannel trousers in despair more than once before she realized that there was really no help for it, and that she had got to make up her mind to the plunge.

She discovered that her husband was very big round the middle; also that his legs were too long. But she turned up the trousers and tied up the waist and regarded herself with complete disgust.

She also wished they wouldn't flap against her legs. It was a perpetual reminder that she was not decently clad.

However, there was the dressing-gown.

She discovered also Henry's sweater, which was infinitely more pleasing, being cut in a V-shape at the neck and quite nicely decorated with the colors of his Oxford college. She pulled it on and tried to shape it to her waist with the cord from the Duke's pajamas. The result was not very good, but the top part was not so unbecoming, after all.

And then, thank heaven, there was always the dressing gown.

A knock at the door caused her to fly precipitately for this approximately feminine garment, in which she enveloped herself before admitting her husband. Her hair she had not had time to arrange.

However, it was good hair, and long. . . .

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Henry came in, flushed from his exercise, and regarded his wife critically for a moment.

"I hope you have not caught cold," he said politely.

"I have had a lovely bath," she replied, drawing the dressing-gown farther round those dreadful gray flannels.

"I am just about to have a bath myself," returned the Duke.

He collected his clothes as another knock was heard at the door.

"Oh—please!" gasped the Duchess.

Henry spoke through the panels.

"It's all right, Dunn," he said; "I will manage for myself." She heard the valet's steps as he went away.

"Thank you," said Molly humbly:

"Not at all," he answered. She went into the bathroom and turned on the water.

"Do you like it very hot?" she asked.

"Please," he answered, "and put the cold in first." It appeared only natural to him that somebody should be turning on his bath.

She obeyed and produced a clean towel from the rack.

"Confound it!" she heard him murmuring. "Where's my dressing-gown?" She realized that she was stamping with both feet on the habits of years. Evidently he remembered that she was wearing it, for he appeared in a moment in a burberry and bedroom slippers.

Sitting in the next room, wondering what she was

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going to say to him when the time for explanations arrived, Molly heard her husband busily engaged in the bath. After some moments his voice, slightly muffled as he spoke through the towel with which he was drying his head, came through to her.

"You will find a pair of gray flannel trousers in the bottom drawer," it said. "I wonder if you would mind throwing them in?"

Molly hunted desperately in the drawer, hoping there would be another pair. "Can't you find them?" she heard him say, a little impatiently, as she gave up the search. She came to the bathroom door and summoned up her courage.

"I'm wearing them," she said, with a quaver.

Henry pulled the plug out of the bath viciously. So this was what it meant to be married!

"The white ones will do," he said, without comment. For all that he was annoyed. No one, he thought, had a right to come into a man's life so intimately as this. Besides, what about last night's confession? Henry, a source of continual mystification to his friends and relations, disliked nothing more himself than inexplicable conduct in others. He dressed with a growing feeling that heaven was not taking him and his creed seriously.

Indeed, nothing is calculated to make a man look more ridiculous than to be pursued by his wife. It has not even the precarious charm of being illicit. Not that Henry would have been in the least thrilled if someone else's wife had run away with him—it would have annoyed him just as much,—but though passionate liaisons are charming and natural, passion-

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ate marriages are, of course, farcical. Who ever heard of a man writing verses to his wife, except perhaps in Turkey, where the wisdom of the East has not eliminated the stimulating element of competition?

As the Duke completed his toilet, he resolved that he would not disturb himself on his wife's account. She had told him what she was, and there was an end of it. He would demand no explanations; it was so much easier that way. He would tell Captain Phillips to put in at Marseilles, or some port which they could make within the next twenty-four hours, and send the girl back to England without any more trouble.

Thus, after returning to the bedroom, when Molly started a little nervously on her recantation, he cut her short and told her that he did not wish to hear any more about it, and that he proposed to send her home from the nearest port. Whereupon he went on deck to tell the Professor.

As for Molly, it had never entered her head that he would refuse to hear what she had to say. Her only difficulty had been how best to tell him that she had lied. Now she was just to be returned without a word.

The desperate resolve had been taken, the dreadful night spent, all for nothing. She sat for some time tragically staring at the chest of drawers.

The bottom drawer, standing open, in feverish disorder where she had hunted for that second pair of trousers, seemed a silent sympathizer with her forlorn condition.

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"It appears," Henry was saying to the Professor, who had waked up, as he always did, automatically, at meal-times, "it appears that my wife has run away with me."

Peter sat up in a hurry and made certain of the presence of his silk handkerchief.

"How can that be?" he asked stupidly.

"She hid herself in one of the lifeboats," the Duke went on. "The ship's course is being altered, and she will be sent back from the nearest port."

Now Peter had heard nothing of Molly's confession to her husband, and he was surprised at Henry's altered tone.

"Well, Henry," he began slowly, but the other cut him short.

"I may as well tell you," he said, "that my wife is an adventuress."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Peter. "How do you know that?"

"She told me so herself," said the Duke.

"Oh!" remarked the Professor inadequately. Things were happening a little too fast for him.

"At any rate," he said at last, "we may as well have the benefit of her company while she is here."

"Possibly she is now more in your line than mine, Peter," Henry returned dryly. "Personally, I am tired of being made a fool of." In the circumstances his dignity was slippery foothold, so he disappeared in the direction of the little cabin which served him for a library and gave himself up to his work of classification. But he accomplished very little. The

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truth is that he was furiously angry with everything.

As for Peter Graine, he sat pondering for a long time over the tea which they brought him. So the Duchess had confessed to being an adventuress? That seemed odd, thought the Professor, as he poured a liberal amount of milk into his cup—very odd. But what a triumph for Octavia! Peter was a little sorry for that, because, away from Lady Blake's sphere of influence, he was a bit of a renegade. Such a pretty woman, too . . . very odd . . . very odd indeed. He nibbled a teacake thoughtfully. Of course it had been impossible to approve of the marriage, but it was unpleasant to fight against a woman. And this is how it had ended! Well, that was what the world was like, and Peter had his reputation for cynicism to keep up. All the same, he was glad he had not taken an active part in the Duchess's destruction which she had now brought about of her own free will. The Professor felt quite glad about that. The truth is, it was not possible to be as susceptible as the old gentleman was and to be a cynic as well.

And so she had actually told Henry that she was a wicked woman! He stared pensively at the tea-leaves. Really, it was the oddest thing that had ever happened.

He lit a cigarette and watched the smoke curl away over his shoulder. She had confessed to her husband and then had run off with him as a stow-away. Without doubt, thought Peter, a very curious programme. Meanwhile, however wicked she

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might be, there was a woman on board, all alone. That was waste.

The old gentleman slowly rose from his chair.

He was not a little surprised to see Molly coming toward him. After spending some time sitting in the little cabin in silent despair, she had decided that anything was better than doing nothing, and had come out determined to find Henry and make him listen to her.

She stopped when she saw Peter, whom she now regarded as one of her natural enemies.

"I came to look for my husband," she said hesitatingly. "I don't know if he told you——" She broke off.

"Oh, yes," answered Peter. "Everything; he always does. We are very old friends, you know." He dragged another chair toward the tea-table. "Have you had tea?" he went on cheerfully.

"I don't want any," she said.

"Henry," continued the Professor, "will be on deck again in a moment, I dare say. Meanwhile, you must allow me to try to entertain you myself."

She sat down in silence in the proffered chair. After all, apparently he was going to be kind to her—that was something.

Peter regarded her with great satisfaction. Really, in that sweater, and the dressing-gown, and the *négligé* hair . . . What a fish Henry was! And she was a wicked woman! Who'd have thought it? pondered the Professor as he looked at her sorrowful brown eyes.

Well, it was no use treating an adventuress like

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a naughty child and putting her in the corner. As for Molly, she was thankful for anyone who would say a pleasant word to her, though, with her thoughts on one thing only, she found it difficult to keep up with Peter's ripple of conversation.

Henry did not put in an appearance at dinner, and Peter invented a headache for him which did not deceive the Duchess in the least. The Professor felt extremely angry at his friend's childish sulks. Meanwhile, of course, there was the advantage of being left entirely alone with a very pretty woman. Indeed, as the evening wore on, the Professor altogether threw over his allegiance to Octavia, and would have been perfectly prepared to advise Henry to cleave to his wife were she the wickedest woman in Europe.

They sat together watching the stars come out, while Molly, completely unconscious of anything but her own disaster, heard as through a fog the continuous prattle of the Professor. As for Peter, stealing sidelong glances at the fresh beauty of the girl beside him, and calling to mind all the adventuresses he had met in the course of a merry youth, the affair appeared to him odder and odder.

Toward half-past nine he had decided that the matter called for fuller investigation. At ten he reminded himself that Henry was really a very simple-minded man. At ten-thirty he was convinced that Molly was no more an adventuress than Octavia herself.

Then Dunn appeared and piloted Molly to the room which had been prepared for her, where she

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found a pair of pajamas the crudeness of which nearly made her cry, and where she lay for many hours gazing at the low ceiling, reflecting the curious blue of the summer night, and thinking of the triumph that was in store for Lady Blake.

Now, although in the ordinary affairs of life he was apt to be cold and calculating, where women were concerned the Professor was a man of violent impulse. Molly's appearance at dinner in Mary's frock had caused the first wavering in the reprehensible old gentleman's alliance with Octavia—this evening had entirely shattered his allegiance to her. Being more or less honestly inclined, so long as he was out of range of Lady Blake's repartee, he was moved to sit down and write to her about it. His letter is of interest as showing to what a pitiable condition an old man of sixty can be reduced by a pretty girl:

"MY DEAR OCTAVIA," he wrote—

"We are on the high seas, and an amazing thing has happened. The Duchess has turned up as a stowaway. I am sure that you never thought of that. Neither did I. It appears that she has told Henry that she is an adventuress, and he will have nothing to do with her. Henry is, I fear, as we have always supposed, an absolute idiot. That girl is no more an adventuress than you are. She wears Henry's dressing-gown and his sweater and, my dear Octavia, trousers! How horrified you would be if you saw her! How horrified I ought to be! But I am not. Somehow, out here at sea our objections

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to the marriage seem a little trivial. Of course, we may be right, but unpleasant doubts come upon me that perhaps some of these things are arranged in heaven, after all.

"Henry proposes sending his wife back from Marseilles, but it seems to me there is something very odd behind this absurd confession of hers. I feel it is my duty to ferret it out. My duty, Octavia. There is certainly a great deal more in it than meets the eye. Why do not women wear sweaters? I had no idea they were so becoming. I shall inquire further into this ridiculous story the Duchess has told Henry. At least the girl ought to be given a chance. I am afraid you will think I have changed my views very suddenly, Octavia, and indeed it is quite possible that you are perfectly right about the affair. But I'm not quite satisfied. What an extraordinary succession of events it has been! Hasn't it? I wonder whether one is ever really right in trying to interfere with the Fates; policemen have been run over, holding up the traffic, before now. Rather a jolly simile of mine!

"Yours ever,
"PETER."

"P. S.—She can't possibly be an adventuress with those eyes. Do you think class distinctions ought to apply to women?

"P. P. S.—Try one of Gerald's sweaters on Mary and see if something can't be done on those lines. My love to you all."

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Some days later Octavia received this letter. Mary had told her mother candidly of her part in the escapade, and Lady Blake, though extremely angry with her daughter for interfering with her own interference in other people's affairs, had discovered at the same time that Mary had quite definite ideas of her own and was not to be bullied. After which Octavia accepted the position, felt many years older than she was, and began seriously to look about for a suitable husband for her daughter. It seemed that when she was a girl young ladies did not grow up so fast. She read Peter's letter and tore it into little pieces.

"Foolish old man!" she murmured. "If Henry doesn't fall in love with his wife soon, Peter will."

CHAPTER XXIII

HENRY ASHAMED OF HIMSELF

MEANWHILE, the "Cobra" steamed through calm seas toward Marseilles. Henry was still extremely angry at being placed in such a foolish position on his own yacht, and, contrary to his usual method of sliding comfortably through all disasters, could think of no better way of dealing with the position than that of ignoring his wife entirely. For all that, he was unable, much to his annoyance, to sweep her out of his mind altogether. That old failing of his, the soft heart, so incongruous with the selfish mind, which had always led him headlong into the indiscriminate charity which his sister had so often censured, but which he found the quickest medicine to soothe its distress, now began to torment him on behalf of the forlorn figure of the adventuress. It was quite in vain that he told himself that adventuresses have no right to look forlorn, especially when they are successful. For they do, and Molly was no exception to the rule. It is but fair to the Duke to remark that this uneasy feeling of his would have been just the same had she been as plain as the heroine of a Cubist's dream. That, indeed, was Molly's tragedy. But Henry's paramount desire was to have done with the whole business and start again in the comfortable insecurity of his self-made Paradise.

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Yet, though he twisted and turned and buried himself in his books, and reviewed in one night the peculiarities of almost every variety of toad, he still found that the figure of the Duchess usurped in his mind the throne which had belonged for so long to the reptiles of the earth. It was as the suspicion of a blue haze on the horizon told Molly that the end of her adventure was in sight, that the foolish old gentleman who had been so unexpectedly kind to her, assuring himself that he was a quite disinterested knight-errant, sought out Henry in his little library, and, taking up a position equivalent to the hearthrug, fixed his friend with a mysterious and portentous frown.

"Henry," he said at last, "do you seriously believe that your wife is an adventuress?"

"I do not know that I any longer seriously believe anything," returned the Duke.

"That is a perfectly childish remark," snapped Peter. "In fact," he added, "you are behaving altogether like a child."

"The problem is not yours, Peter; it is mine."

"And you are facing it like a man, I suppose?"

Henry answered nothing.

"That girl is your wife," went on the Professor. "You cannot get over that."

"Have you not rather changed your tone," asked the Duke, "since we left Wynninghame Towers?"

"Yes, I have," said Peter stoutly. "And I have written a letter, which I shall post at Marseilles, telling Octavia that I have."

"Do you think we are far enough away to make

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that safe?" queried Henry. "But I suppose repartee by wireless loses some of its point."

"I admit," said Peter, "that I am a coward. Where women are concerned I become invertebrate. I am afraid of the clever ones and a slave to the pretty ones. But that is a great deal better than being indifferent to everything, like you."

"Well," asked Henry with a sigh, "what has made you change your mind?"

"I have not changed my mind," he replied. "I consider the marriage entirely unsuitable and a great calamity; I consider this stowaway business exceedingly regrettable, and, if it gets about, calculated to make you look perfectly ludicrous, Henry. But when you tell me your wife is an adventuress that is absurd."

"Why absurd?"

"Just because she is nothing of the kind."

"How do you know?"

"Because I spent my younger days acquiring the knowledge; a vicious youth is not always waste of time."

"And you consider yourself infallible in your judgments?"

The Professor gave a short laugh.

"An amateur," he said, "would find no difficulty in this case."

"Can you explain, then, Peter, why she deliberately confessed to me?"

"I could," he answered, "give several hypotheses which would cover that, but I do not propose to do so. You must ask her yourself."

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The Duke rose, stretched his arms rather wearily, and walked to the other side of the little cabin.

"These things do not interest me, Peter," he said. "I wish to take up my life where I left it off."

"You cannot correct mistakes so easily," replied his friend.

The Duke was startled. Was it not the latter half of his disastrous creed?

Circumstances had routed him in his crusade. Could it be that the moment had come for a rally? He found himself unaccountably glad that perhaps Molly was not so wicked, after all. He would try once more to pick up the pieces of his crumbling campaign.

"Very well, Peter," he said; "send her to me!"

The Professor stared at him.

"Send her to you?" he echoed. "I'll do nothing of the sort. Who are you to grant an audience to your wife? You will go to her, and you will apologize humbly for ever believing a word she said. When you married, Henry, you stepped out of the watertight compartment you have presumed to call your life. It is no use supposing that you can get back again. You have stepped into the world, and you are bound to suffer, because you don't know your way about. Send her to you, indeed! Do you know what she'd do? She'd refuse to speak to you again."

Not that Molly, whose devotion was quite doglike and undignified, would have done anything else but arrive on the instant, humbly and joyfully. But

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the Duke felt a little ashamed of himself, and with a great effort endeavored to see the affair from some other angle than his own. It struck him as curious that a marriage which he had perhaps considered rather quixotic and generous seemed to be turning out to be nothing of the kind. For here was Peter simply bristling with indignation at his behavior, and evidently convinced that he was acting like a scoundrel.

Henry was really bewildered at the sudden turn of events. Peter, of all men, to be telling him how to behave to a woman! Peter, whose cynicism on that subject had so often roused his contempt! It appeared that he had been in the habit of saying pretty things about women and the world from the fastness of his watertight compartment. But now that he had ventured to come out, he did not know how to behave.

Well, if Henry's egotism was a little contemptible and if his monastic existence had been a mistake, he was, after all, genuinely anxious to correct his mistakes as they occurred.

"Very well, Peter," he answered, "I will go to her. But, first, I want to know what has made you suddenly change your mind?"

The Professor immediately produced his silk handkerchief.

"I have," he said, with the most stupendous dignity, "I have . . . er . . . been er . . . talking to your wife. . . . I have seen a great deal of her in the last twelve hours. . . . and I have been forced to the conclusion——" He mopped his forehead

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violently. "You fool, Henry!" he said. "She has the most wonderful eyes I have ever seen!"

The Duke could not help smiling. So even the altruism of Peter was not altogether unselfish.

"Has she?" he answered. "What color are they?"

"How do you expect a woman to remain faithful to you," said the Professor, "if you do not remember the color of her eyes?"

Again Henry started, for he certainly had supposed that she would remain faithful to him. Why, indeed?

And so the Duke went on deck in search of his wife, and the Professor sat in the library reflecting on his misspent and happy youth, when a pair of brown eyes could mean a great deal more to him than a little sentimental philanthropy, and if his thoughts could not help leaping back once or twice to Wynninghame Towers and Octavia's rage at his treachery, he comforted himself with the reflection that the South Sea Islands are a very long way from Elton Wick. Also he had that very comfortable feeling inside which comes to old men who, as someone has wittily put it, being no longer able to set a bad example, have started to give good advice.

The cliffs were already quite visible when Henry found his wife watching the little stretch of blue waters that represented the limit of time that was left for her to drag her Romance out of the ashes.

Ten minutes later she was telling him the truth as he sat by her side, looking gravely down at his toes.

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"And so," he said at last, "it was because you thought you had disgraced me?"

"Yes," she answered.

"I never saw it in that light," he said. "It is for Lady Helen to be ashamed. But that," he added, "is of course incredible."

So he believed her. What would he do now? Marseilles was very close.

"I feel I owe you an apology," he was saying; "an apology for many things: for Lady Helen and Octavia and for Wynnninghame Towers. And there is one thing more for which I owe you an apology."

"What is that?" she asked.

"It is," he said slowly, "because I do not love you, and you were made to be loved."

He looked across the water a little wistfully. All in a second he seemed to her to have become her dream-monger again.

"Must I go back?" she whispered.

He did not answer her. When he spoke it was almost to himself.

"My God!" he said, all of a sudden. "What have I done?" The full extent of her devotion to him he now realized for the first time. "I have promised everything, and I have nothing to give!"

He did not know that she had heard him until he heard her murmur an answer.

"You promised nothing," she said.

But he did not heed her. He saw that she had suffered for him and he felt degraded. To him the burden had seemed to belong, but she had carried it. He heard her whispering again.

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"Must I go back?" she said.

Still, he thought, she was ready to follow him to the ends of the earth. He had no right to refuse her. He had no right not to want her. A turmoil of desire to atone swept over him. Once let loose from his wonted indifference to things, he lost his balance and made mountains out of mud pies. He saw her as a Joan of Arc crucified on the ruins of his crusade. He cursed himself because he did not know how to start loving her. A mental vision of her night in the lifeboat set the seal on his abject view of himself. Naturally, since his mind was occupied in vividly distorting comedy into tragedy, his words were banal.

"We shall have to buy clothes," he said.

And so the Duchess realized that she was, after all, to have the chance for which she had prayed, for surely the next best thing to a country cottage is a desert island. Being a girl who never forgot her friends, she sent a picture-postcard to Mary from Marseilles, bearing this legend:

"I am going all the way to look for the Golden Toad. I believe now that we shall find it.

"MOLLY."

The romantic Mary, who showed the postcard to her mother as a matter of course, did not trouble to explain that the Golden Toad in this case had nothing to do with Uncle Henry's illusions. As for Octavia, as a Christian she could not hope that the ship would founder with all hands, but as a member

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of the Church of England she had a perfect right to trust that a "judgment" would descend upon the Duchess of Wynnninghame, and a minor judgment upon the Professor, whom she liked and whose weaknesses she knew.

Meanwhile, a small boat shot away from the yacht's side and bobbed its way toward the harbor. In it sat Peter and the Duke, who were going shopping. They were only going to buy enough wardrobe to enable Molly to complete her purchases herself, and Peter was quite capable of buying a possible coat and skirt and not making an utter fool of himself over a hat.

While the boat twinkled in the sun and grew smaller and smaller until it disappeared amongst the shipping, Molly sat on the upper deck following it with dancing eyes.

Yes, Master Man of the World, it is going to be another of those infernal love stories, after all, and if you did not guess that from their first tea-party at the Zoo, you ought never to have been trusted with a novel at all, and it serves you right.

All the same, Fate had one more card to play before the Pioneer Duchess was able to drag from behind those kind but cold gray eyes the treasure which she knew lay hidden there.

CHAPTER XXIV

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TRUE to her word, Molly did not, as the "Cobra" ploughed through the desert of waters, and as the sun grew hotter every day, intrude her love upon her husband. Rather, she sought the society of Peter, who amused her by telling her the adventures of his youth, a history which he regarded with gravity and pride. There is no place where nothing happens so regularly as on board ship, and the single adventure, as far as the Duchess was concerned, was a sudden gale, which she thought heralded the end of the world, but which Captain Phillips called a capful of wind. Molly was as happy as she had ever been during the long hot days, listening to the Professor's stories or watching Henry take his afternoon's exercise round the yacht's decks. At night, when it seemed still hotter and when time stood still, it must be confessed that she sometimes lay awake thinking about her husband and praying for the miracle which never happened. For the Duke, though he did not forget the sudden revelation of her suffering on his behalf, and though he was kindness and charm itself whenever he and his wife were together, yet made no effort to meet his fate half way.

So the yacht slipped quietly through the water until one morning they woke to find the ship at

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anchor and the island of Henry's dream, looking like the Prince's Garden in the pantomime, a few hundred yards away. It was a great deal bigger than Molly had imagined it, and she was quite astonished when Peter explained that it would take at least six days to walk round its coasts.

What astonished her still more was the fact that such a beautiful piece of real estate was entirely uninhabited, while Ball Street contained fifty families on one side alone. This surprising result of Civilization and Progress she confided to Peter, who assured her that her ideas on the subject were absurd, but who was quite unable to explain why.

Meanwhile, preparations were going forward for the last phase in the expedition in search of the Golden Toad, and finally a boat left the ship's side, and, heavily burdened, proceeded slowly toward the shore.

In the bows sat Henry, nursing a little zinc cage and thinking of nothing at all but frogs and froggy matters. Near him was Dunn, carrying a heap of mosquito nets in his arms, like a baby. Peter was in the stern; his whole impedimenta consisted of a cigar which he carried in his mouth, and the fumes of which he contended were proof against whole armies of mosquitoes. The Duchess sat by his side. Two members of the crew, besides the rowers, were also included in the landing-party, their duty being to carry the little tents and odds and ends which were to form their quarters during the exploration.

"The actual spot mentioned by Cook, where he discovered the toad," said Henry, after the landing

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had been made and they were walking up the beach, "is rather hard to trace."

"It would be," rejoined Peter, "bearing in mind the man's unfortunate failing."

"You will never find anything, Peter," answered the Duke, "if you approach it in that way."

"I am here," said the Professor, "for my health; I am not going to injure it by overworking my imagination."

"No," murmured Henry; "I should be very careful of your imagination."

Thus they fell to wrangling as to whether Peter actually possessed any imagination at all, which led in a very short while to a discussion on that social high explosive, his sense of humor. It is a curious trait in human beings that they would far rather be accused of lacking a moral sense than of being unable to see a joke. Myself, I confess I would rather share a maisonette with Chicot than with Martin Luther. Still more would I prefer to see them share one together.

Thus Henry and Peter wrangled and Molly marvelled at her surroundings. This South Sea paradise, the defects of which, in the shape of insects, vapors, foul smells and general rankness, never really let themselves go until the evening, seemed to her the nearest possible approach to the Garden of Eden. If one regards the world from the angle of a desert island, what better point of view is available so long as we remain a little lower than the angels? If, I repeat, one has this rare opportunity, many things which constant use has rendered as

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commonplace as the miracle of life itself will appear in a very different light. To Molly, for instance, the fact that the little party of six were the only human beings in this unemployed Paradise was matter of wonder and infinite speculation. She was actually living through the most outlandish scenes of those "silly books" which once upon a time she had been accustomed to invoke, lest Ball Street break her heart. For people's hearts do break, though the whole College of Surgeons deny it; and though Cupid is often arraigned on the charge, what breaks them could best be told by the grim and silent cities.

So the Duchess, casting her eye over the total population of Toad Island, marvelled that in Bell Street, which was at the bottom of Ball Street, there lived families whose very faces she did not know. It is really a very curious thing that though time and space are being brought to heel more thoroughly every century, our neighbors remain as complete a mystery as Adam, until the unfortunate fruit combine, was to Eve. Molly had the unhappy type of mind, commoner among women than among men, which is always endeavoring to piece life together like a puzzle and make it a whole, regardless of the fact that if the world is a puzzle it has several of the pieces missing, lost perhaps by that same Adam and Eve, and never recovered.

So she puzzled about why men lived in cities, where there were no bright colors, and why everybody lived according to somebody else's rules, so that impoverished clerks in dingy suburbs, who were only really alive when they were asleep and dream-

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ing, wasted valuable time every night putting their trousers under the mattress, in order that there might be a perceptible crease down the centre in the City next day. And why her own mother thought God was a spiteful policeman with unlimited powers, whereas really He was a bird of paradise high up in a tropical tree. And whether the grace of a lovely woman was as revolting as the beauty of a snake gliding away to some mysterious homestead under the dark foliage. And, if so, why they were in the world at all. And why, under the sea, which is always rippling with laughter at the jokes cracked by the sun, there lay wrecks and bones and disasters.

And why Henry did not love her.

They had their lunch in a little clearing where giant trees looked down on them, peering, as it were, over one another's shoulders, like a curious crowd in a London street. It awed Molly, who, like most sensitive people, felt easily dwarfed. She remembered her last picnic, a pilgrimage to that little mountainous hillock on Hampstead Heath where seven moribund trees stand stark against the sky, mutely begging some charitable person to cut them down before they suffer the indignity of being completely surrounded by Greater London. It had been a very jolly picnic, where she had lain under a bush and devoured at least half of a silly book. Now she was her own heroine—a much less restful occupation.

After lunch they left the baggage men and Dunn in the clearing, where Peter proposed that they should spend the night, and with Henry's enthusiasm no whit abated by the long morning's walk, set out

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for the spot where he conjectured that Cook had seen the toad. Molly found herself getting very tired as she tried to keep up with Henry and the Professor, who were each so set on proving the other a fool that they never noticed either the pace at which they were going or the distance which they were covering. They talked volubly and without ceasing about reptiles, and used long and dignified Latin names which made the Duchess feel as if she were an eavesdropper, though in reality they were only speaking of the habits of the common earthworm and might as well have used his English *alias*. For though scientists and lawyers like their languages dead (on the theory, perhaps, that dead men tell no tales), few of us, except very simple souls like Molly, are taken in any more than when we hear our fashionable friends speaking French with a county family accent. But the Duchess, who was always prepared to feel small at a moment's notice, fell behind when, the argument becoming fiercer, the Latin grew more virulent, in sympathy.

So it happened that she wandered along after them, soon lost in her own thoughts, which were highly uninteresting except to herself. For they were of Henry all the time: Henry in his study, Henry in a cottage drawing-room, with her pouring out tea for him, Henry in a kitchen garden holding a basket, while she delved amongst the cabbages, Henry reading, Henry playing, Henry glad, and Henry gloomy; till at last she looked up and discovered that there was no Henry walking ahead of her at all!

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The fact was that as their argument got hotter and hotter, so the Professor and his friend had walked quicker and quicker, and Molly, since wool-gathering is always a slow business, was soon left far behind. Now she ran forward hastily, thinking that they could not be very far ahead. But the path was treacherous and devious, and before very long the Duchess was a great deal farther away from her companions than she had been at the moment when she had discovered their absence.

She wandered on and on, expecting every minute to come upon them round some corner or beyond the next clump of trees, until at last, looking up, and seeing that the patches of light that filtered down through the roof of foliage were already failing, she realized that she was lost, and stood still with a vague terror beginning to clutch at her, as if she were descending inch by inch into icy water.

She called out for Henry, and was answered by such a tremendous silence that she was somehow afraid to call again. She knew now that she had not been following them, after all, and, knowing that she must have covered several miles, she realized that they were far away from her. She sat down suddenly on the ground and tried to reason out what was the best thing for her to do. But all she found herself able to realize was the vast silence of the wilderness of woods that surrounded her. It seemed to crush all attempts at escape.

And as she sat, there crossed her line of vision, progressing with ungainly flops across the little patch

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of rank weed and grass, a large toad with an irregular line of pure gold down the centre of his glistening back; an aristocratic old gentleman whose paunch alone entitled him to a place in the most dignified circles.

Molly watched him tumble his way across the little space until he was almost out of sight behind the cool shelter of some enormous leaves, before she realized that he was the Golden Toad in person. It was in search of him that the expedition had been made—she must capture him, at all costs.

She went quickly to the spot where she had seen him disappear, and began delicately to poke about with a twig among the leaves. She had never been on intimate terms with a toad, and she was shy. Near by was a great stone with a long ragged crevice creeping up into its centre from the ground. Molly realized from the rich moss which clung to the little rock how damp her surroundings were going to be as soon as the sun went off duty. Into this crevice she fancied that the toad must have gone, and she tentatively poked her stick into the opening. But as nothing happened, and as she conceived it her duty to capture the monster for Henry, however unpleasant the operation, she gave a little shudder and plunged her hand into the aperture.

There was a sharp wrench, and Molly felt an intolerable pain in her wrist. She had caught it in the crevice, as in a vise, and in the instantaneous effort to withdraw her hand had sprained the wrist badly. She felt momentarily faint, and leaned against the

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little rock for some seconds, holding the injured hand to her heart.

Yet, for a few minutes, the Duchess still refused to give up the search for Henry's toad. It was only when she suddenly discovered that she could no longer use her wrist at all, that it was already almost twice its right size, and that her whole forearm was on fire, that she gave up the quest and returned into the little clearing. The sun was already down, and the whole air was filled with the buzz of a million flies and mosquitoes. She sat down with her back against a tree and tried with her one hand to ward off the attack of these harpies. But her soft white skin and her inadequate defenses were too great a temptation, and in a few minutes she was suffering the torments of the damned.

She rose and paced to and fro, a cloud of satellites screaming round her head. The pain in her wrist, too, was growing intolerable, and the tears were soon running down her cheeks from suffering and despair.

But one cannot cry forever, and one cannot walk forever, and at last, quite exhausted, the unfortunate Duchess literally fell in her tracks and lay on the soft damp ground, her face buried in her arms. And when the pain in her wrist grew worse and the whole world seemed dancing and buzzing and biting, as if every spiteful creature thereon had found her defenseless and was determined to add his mite to her suffering, she became delirious and called again and again for Henry and Samuel Shine (who was comfortably drunk at the moment in a tavern in the Vauxhall

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Bridge Road), and even for Mary, whom she remembered vaguely as one of the figures in her Romance who had been kindly disposed toward her. . . . But at last she called no more, and lay quite still. . . .

Half a mile away, though by the twisting path the distance was three times as great, Henry and the Professor halted and looked round for Molly. They shouted several times with their combined lung-power, but as only the vibrant note of hungry mosquitoes answered them, they turned and stared at each other in dismay.

"I thought," said the Duke weakly, "that she was only just behind us."

"So did I," answered the Professor, mopping his brow. "Damn these mosquitoes!" he added. "Why didn't we bring the nets?"

"I had no idea," said Henry, "we should come so far or be out so late; perhaps she has gone back."

He turned quickly and retraced his steps; a growing fear that Molly had met with some disaster was beginning to master him. He stopped suddenly.

"Peter," he said, "supposing she has lost herself."

"We shall find her," returned the old man. "There is no reason why she should come to any harm." But he spoke without conviction.

They shouted again, without response.

"We were fools to let her come," said Henry.

They shouted again, without response.

"There are no wild beasts on the island," murmured the Professor.

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"She will be frightened out of her life," said his companion. He bit his lip as he thought of her spending the night in the woods.

Peter flicked violently at the mosquitoes with his silk handkerchief.

"We had better go back to the camp," he said, "and form a search-party."

After this they walked on for some time in silence save for an occasional "Damn!" from the Professor as some insect more nimble than his fellows evaded the old gentleman's defenses. But they had not gone very far before Henry stopped again.

"Peter," he said, "I can't wait. You must go back and get the search-party; I am going to look for her myself."

"Don't be ridiculous," grunted the Professor. "You will only lose yourself. What is the use of that?"

"I tell you I'm going," snapped the Duke, a great deal more peremptorily than Peter's mild expostulation had warranted, and the older man, who had been consulting his watch, suddenly forgot to put it back into his pocket and stared at Henry in surprise. But as his eyes met those of his friend his surprise gave way to utter astonishment, for Henry, though he returned the Professor's stare quite frankly, was blushing like a boy at his first party.

Peter, after his first astonishment, was wise enough to say nothing, and continued on his way back to the camp, where he remarked, dryly enough, that the Duke and his wife were lost, and that it was the uncomfortable fate of everybody to turn out and look

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for them, which, in a silence far too vivid to stand the test of description in print, they did.

But what had happened to Henry, and why should a man of mature age, who had never blushed in his life, suddenly develop the uncomfortable embarrassments of an *ingénue*? All I can tell you is that pity (as Henry himself would have put it) is often the amœba of love, and the Duke, making the sudden discovery that in his case the process of evolution was complete, had been altogether overwhelmed and covered with confusion.

As he crashed through the undergrowth, frightening away in his violence even the hungriest of mosquitoes, he threw off the whole of his creed, which had suddenly appeared to him so trivial, and determined to become the perfect lover. What is a formula to do when it is confronted by a passion? Flee precipitately, of course, and never lift its head again, till old age or disappointment or dyspepsia lets down the drawbridge and opens the gates to it once more.

Henry's conversion had not, in reality, been so quick as it sounds. Ever since the sudden vision of his own egotism had torn from him the tragic cry, "I have promised everything, and I have nothing to give," he had, in his slow, deliberate way, been working back through the events of his short married life and right through his bachelor existence to the foundations of his precious and momentous creed. Year after year, day after day, hour after hour of useless and lonely selfishness, rose before his brain as the picture of his life. That, at least, was how he saw it, for your reformed egoist becomes the

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most violent of reactionaries. He did not remember that he had always been kind, seldom intolerant, never vicious. He only saw himself as a hard and silent figure in a large, inhuman house, and, what is worse, he felt that he was still hardening. And thus, while he distorted to himself his faults and dismissed from the audience altogether his poor little virtues, he found himself stealing glances at Molly in the radiance of her happiness during the voyage, and longing for a little of her vitality and humanity and sympathy. So that it was not long before he was wondering whether he was worthy of her society. And that, as all lovers know, is the beginning of the end. Yet he had not approached her. Indeed, now that she appeared his superior, Henry was shy of his wife. This was his state of mind when the landing had been made, and the imminence of the climax of the expedition had temporarily driven it out of his head, in the new enthusiasm for the Golden Toad. It was only when the disaster narrated in this chapter occurred that the Duke discovered that he was hopelessly and utterly in love. So now you may picture him, crashing through the woods, calling her name at intervals, listening for a moment and then pressing on, leaving the last remnants of his theories and philosophies behind him at every step, and every moment becoming, more and more, that primitive and delightful creation—a man in love with a maid.

And of course Providence, which, it is our duty to believe, had really been looking after Molly all the time, arranged that he should find her.

She was lying where we last left her; her head

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lay on her uninjured arm, and her face was the face of one who had not a trouble in the world. For someone who looks after these things had noticed her distress, and had bade Morpheus go and attend to her case.

She woke in Henry's arms and dreamed that there were tears in his eyes. Unmanly fellow! What has a Peer at thirty-eight to do with weeping? Yet Molly saw in his tears the hidden treasure she had been looking for behind those kind gray eyes. Well, well, she may have been right. If laughter is a gift, why not tears?

But Henry's wife had something of the spirit of the sentinel of Pompeii, so that her first words were of the absurd Toad, which, she thought, lay nearest to Henry's heart.

"The Toad!" she whispered. "I saw it!"

"Damn the Toad!" returned Henry, and she was well pleased to leave it at that and to receive the little oath on her lips.

"Oh, my little one—my little one!" he said, and the Duchess knew that her cottage was no longer in the air.

Pah! The sentiment of it!

"My darling!" she began, and her arms stole round his neck. "My darling . . ."

No. I will not write it. We have all played the scene, every one of us, and we know just how it goes. It is hard to believe that old Uncle George, who sits such an unconscionable time behind his paper at the Athenæum, is as well able to fill in the

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conversation of the Duke and Duchess as you or I; but he is, and so is poor old Aunt Ellen, who is full of good works, and may leave us her four hundred a year any day now. Love-making is the only genuine antique left to us. I am not going to profane it by putting it in the catalogue with the others.

I will be an eavesdropper at anything but that.

CHAPTER XXV

AN AMATEUR LOVER

BACK to Wynninghame House and Piccadilly, with an October wind hurtling down to Leicester Square from Hyde Park and mouse-faced women and pinched men contracting their winter chills and bad tempers; with motor omnibuses, each a complete cosmos in itself, clattering and screeching their way from Mayfair to the slums, completely indifferent to each, as is consonant with the dignity of such colossi; with ladies of virtue and ladies of vanity rubbing shoulders; with gentlemen in white spats with a library of bills, and others in shabby coats whose credit is everywhere unchallenged; artists whose reputation depends upon their ugliness, and beggars whose income rests on their capacity for woes rather than the value of the matches they never sell; humbug and high brow (often arm in arm) on the sunny side, with impatient Merit scowling along on the other—how a modern Juvenal would revel in this Suburra! What a wonderful six-shillings' worth would be the reflections on modern Piccadilly of Swift, the gloomy Dean! But though the nakedness of the land was thus exposed (as, indeed, it is exposed every day of the year for me and you to see), the Duchess of Wynninghame, who was walking up toward Wynninghame House by the side of her lord and master, on the sunny side, of course, and who

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had been the author of those sentimental reflections on Desert Islands which we have just heard, understood perfectly well why men lived in cities, and why they were the most fascinating places in the world. Which only shows that philosophy is entirely governed by environment. And if she mentioned to him the discovery of the Golden Toad, she found him uninterested, and dropped the subject to make room for another and a more absorbing.

As for Henry, a light is thrown on his condition by the remarks of Octavia, who was standing on the steps of Wynninghame House, talking to the Professor.

"How disgusting it is," she said, "to see a man so ridiculously *épris* of his own wife!"

"Disgusting!" echoed the Professor, who was now deprived of an audience for the story of his youth. But Octavia smiled at him so wickedly, at this, that the poor old gentleman rushed to his silk handkerchief in a panic.

"He behaves like a young man with his first affaire," she remarked. "Mysteries, closed taxis, whisperings, and even verses, for all I know." She broke off and tapped angrily with her foot on the step. "Well," she said at last with a sigh, "I suppose we have got to put up with it now. If Mary had not been an impertinent little chit, and you, Peter, a ridiculous old fool, we should have prevented the catastrophe."

"You still consider it a catastrophe, then?" said the Professor.

"Oh, no, Peter!" rejoined Octavia, with heavy

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sarcasm. "Every woman likes to have a sister-in-law half her age, who has triumphed over her!" By which the old gentleman understood that her own defeat worried Lady Blake a great deal more than Henry's misalliance.

"And why—why," cried that lady, throwing up her hands toward heaven, in despair, "why did he ever marry her?"

The Professor shook his head.

"I don't know," he answered. "Why does Henry do anything?"

Lady Blake sighed and stepped into her car.

"Well," she said, "I have left my cards and my capitulation in the hall; next to victory, Peter, the best policy is a charming surrender. I refuse to disturb myself."

*"Aequam memento rebus in arduis
Servare mentem,"*

murmured the Professor.

"Tell him Curzon Street," answered Octavia, who always fled before anything but French. She leaned back in the car, and was borne away without a single misgiving as to her fitness for this world or the next. And if suavity is a virtue in heaven, there Lady Blake will surely be found in the seats which will undoubtedly be reserved for Mayfair.

Other ideas, other ways than her own had crossed her path, engaged her, and beaten her. Since she had no idea that she might be wrong, it must needs be the world that was going to the Devil; and thus having entirely missed the point of the whole busi-

SIMPLE SOULS

ness, she shifted the blame on to the broad shoulders of Time, and, as she stood in front of the big pier-glass in her bedroom, remarked to herself, "I am getting old."

Yet on the first day on which you put your hair up, Octavia, were you not already My Lady with nothing to learn? I despise you? Certainly not. You can be very amusing at times, and I shall often be seen in Curzon Street on your first and third Tuesdays. But I hope that when you are an old woman and frightened at the dark, you will find someone to sit by you and hold your hand.

The lights are out in Wynninghame House, and the Duchess is asleep and dreaming. Obviously I cannot go in to her, so I blow her a kiss from the other side of the door and take my leave. The circumference of the universe is no bigger than her wedding ring. For her the earth and the stars and the moon and the sun are contained behind Henry's black waistcoat. As for their love, there has never been anything like it: it is a portent, a miracle! But why go on? The Duchess is asleep and dreaming, and of course her married life is going to be just the same as everybody else's.

Downstairs in the study a light is still burning, and the Professor, with his spectacles crooked on the bridge of his nose, and a book elaborately propped up before him, is reading about the lives of the lesser carnivora. Sometimes he makes notes with a silver pencil, in the margin. On the other side of the table sits Henry. He also has a pencil in his

AN AMATEUR LOVER

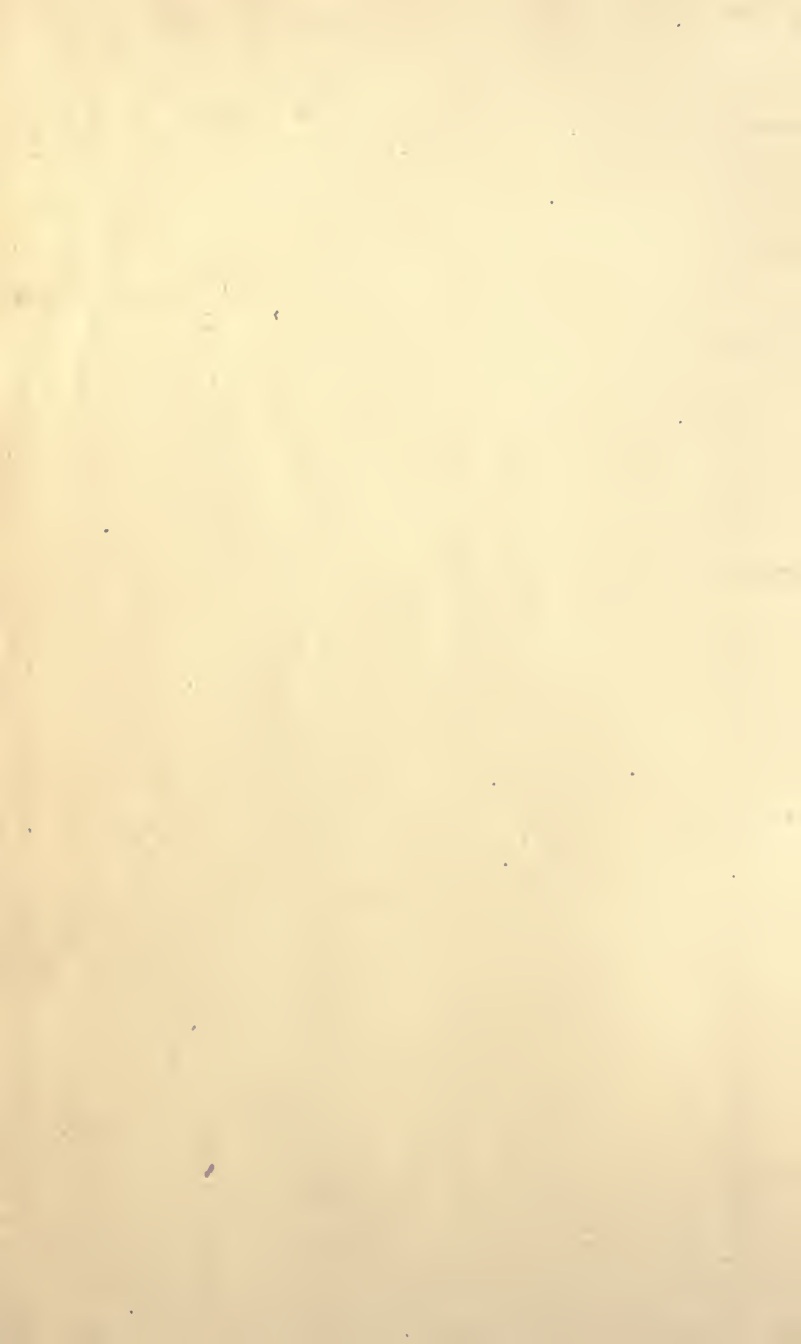
hand and a piece of paper before him. What is the animal he is studying? Look over his shoulder and see. He has not got very far with his notes; in fact, the only writing on his paper consists of the words "To Molly," inscribed at the top with a neat line underneath. He breathes heavily and taps his pencil on the table, to the great annoyance of his friend.

"Peter," he says at last, "what rhymes with 'Molly'—besides 'jolly'?"

But Peter has long since returned to his wonted cynicism, and he looks up from his book with a snort. "Folly," he grunts savagely.

At which Henry is angry and goes to bed.





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